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THE CHRISTIAN MIRROR,

AND OTHER SERMONS.

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BY THE REV.

JAMES MARTIN, B.A.

(*Late of Nottingham and Melbourne*),

AUTHOR OF "THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT."

London:
HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1878.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN publishing this collected edition of sermons, which have previously appeared in various ephemeral forms, my chief purpose is to hand down to my children a lasting remembrance of their father as a preacher.

Many friends might have preferred sermons delivered by my husband at a later date; but the claims of a large church during the last six years prevented his having the time to make such a revision as would justify their now being printed.

With the earnest desire that the lives of those whom he sought to make "wise unto salvation" will furnish a lasting record of how faithfully he sought to be a "preacher of righteousness," I now consign this volume to my children and my friends.

HANNAH MARTIN.

MELBOURNE.

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THE CHRISTIAN MIRROR.

"*Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.*"
I COR. xiii. 12.

"WE know in part." Eighteen centuries have passed since these words were written. They have been centuries of great discovery, and yet they are as true as ever. The additions made to the large stores of human knowledge are constantly opening new and illimitable fields for further research, and showing more clearly than ever how little we know. We are "ever learning, but never coming to the knowledge of the truth." And although the light of the present day, when contrasted with the darkness of past ages, might naturally elate us with pride; yet we have only to reflect for a moment upon the boundless extent of the fields yet unexplored, and the vast extent of what we do not know, to feel that humility is still the becoming attitude for man.

This was apparently the thought which the apostle Paul wanted to impress upon the minds of his readers when writing these words. His object was not to deny that the knowledge gained through the revelation of Christ was of incalculable worth, nor merely

to lay stress upon the still fuller light that we shall have hereafter, but to remind us how imperfect all our knowledge must necessarily be on earth, how little we either know or can know here.

The Corinthians especially needed this. Their knowledge had puffed them up with pride, and those who had the gift of knowledge did all they could to make others feel that they thought this gift of knowledge a very wonderful thing. The apostle writes to tell them that he knows something far better than this: that the gift of charity or love, which does not think much of itself but thinks all the good it can of others, is far superior to any gift of knowledge, or any other gifts that we can possibly call our own.

He then proceeds to show them that in all the knowledge we possess there is not so much to be proud of after all. A child is proud enough of its knowledge if it happen to know a little more than others; but the day soon comes when he himself looks down upon the little that elated him once, and is ashamed of all childish ideas. As young beginners, a little knowledge puffs us up, but advancing study soon carries us away from our first conceits, and we look with astonishment at the opinions and attainments of which we were once so vain. And this is all but a faint foreshadowing of the progress we shall surely make and the change that must take place when "our earthly tabernacle is dissolved," and for the first time in our whole existence we see

things as they really are. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

I.—*The Value of our Present Light.*

"We see." But in what sense can we be said to see? Knowledge is not an object of sight, but of thought. The revelations of truth are not made to the eye but to the mind. Even when Christ was on the earth, though men saw Him with the eye, it was only with the mind that they could see the Father, the God manifest in the flesh. And so far as the world to come has been revealed at all, it has not been by opening a window in heaven, or even by showing visions on which the eye could gaze, but by far different ways from these. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard the things which God hath prepared, but God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit." By seeing, then, the apostle evidently means the possession of superior knowledge, of clearer intuition, a more distinct understanding, and in this sense only do "we see."

1. In contrast with the heathen "we see." The readers of this epistle had nearly all been heathen idolators once. There were very few of them who had not put their penny into the mouth of some departing relative to pay his passage in Charon's boat to the Elysian fields. They all had their vague notions of a shadowy world of pleasure or of pain in

which the departed were living still. All the heathen had as much light as this. The thought of a future state was too indelible for them to destroy; but the broad canvas was filled with pictures of their own wild imagination, as untruthful as they were vague and visionary. All this the Gospel had completely changed. Christ had brought life and immortality to light. They knew that "this corruptible would put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality," and that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." A flood of light had been poured upon their heathen darkness by the Gospel of Christ.

> "Dark clouds of gloomy night He broke,
> Unveiling an immortal day."

2. Again, in contrast with the discoveries of science, "we see." Great and wonderful have those discoveries been, both in the heavens and the earth. With persevering diligence have men of science pursued their researches, unravelling the mysteries of the earth and tracing out the laws that govern the most distant stars. And their diligence has been rewarded. The strata of the earth, that insoluble enigma of former ages, have been all mapped out. The bowels of the earth are as well known as its surface. The inhabitants of the earth, that were buried in their graves long ages before Adam breathed, have been disin-

terred. And we can see with our own eye the *fauna* and *flora* of the earliest age. Almost to the central fire has man forced his way. And his flight has been as lofty as his descent has been deep. In his own small observatory the astronomer maps out the stars, notes all their movements, predicts their advent and departure, and even discovers of what metals they are composed. All that can be known he is thus steadily revealing; and the secrets of heaven are opening to his all powerful key. And his knowledge is as minute as it is lofty and deep. There is not a fibre of the brain, nor a muscle in all the body, that science has not laid bare. The skill of the anatomist is, perhaps, the most marvellous of all. Not only has he proved that we are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, but he has done all that could be done to bring to light the purpose of God in the creation of man, the great masterwork of His Almighty hand.

And yet how insuperable is the barrier that limits all the discoveries that science can make, and shuts out from its vision the most important field of all! Neither in heaven nor in earth has the geologist or astronomer ever discovered the islands of the blest or the mansions of our Father's house. Science has no glass to bring to light the home of the just, no dissecting knife to lay bare or microscope to reveal the immortal spirit that wings its flight to that eternal home. It can solve no such mysteries as these, and had our faith to wait till science had discovered,

the future would be hopeless indeed. But this unknown region has been all revealed. The word of Christ has been heard through all the gloom: "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." Enlightened by that word, which bridges over the great abyss of darkness, faith goes with steady steps straight up to God, and in that light "we see."

3. And even in contrast with the Old Testament saints "we see." We have no account of the precise revelation they had received or the amount of light they really possessed. We can only gather this from their own words. But these are quite enough to show that if their faith was firm, their knowledge was very limited indeed. All that Job could say in the face of the great mystery was, "There is hope of a tree if it be cut down that it will sprout again; . . . but man dieth and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" Hezekiah, one of the most godly of the kings of Judah, when he expected to die, could only say with bitterness of heart, "The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee, they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth." And even the psalmist, with all his inspiration, had no more hopeful song than this: "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." "Shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy

loving kindness be declared in the grave, or Thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark?" Such was the gloom, with all their faith, which Old Testament believers saw in the grave. How great is the contrast when we open the New Testament page, and read the dying words of Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" or the bold apostrophe of Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" and his cheerful declaration, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." The gloom is gone; "Jesus hath broken the bars of the tomb." His words, "Where I am there shall also My servant be," have scattered all the darkness, and with the clearest light "we see."

II.—*The Necessary Limits and Imperfections of our Present Sight.*

"We see through a glass, darkly." The apostle uses a striking figure here. At first it does not appear very clearly how looking through a glass should necessarily make anything dark at all. Some glasses, as the microscope and telescope, do the very opposite; and even through good plate glass we can see quite as distinctly as if it were not there. It might be said that in the apostle's day there either was no glass at all, or it was not so transparent as ours. But this would be a great mistake: there was very transparent glass indeed long before the apostle's times.

The explanation is rather that the ancients did not use glass to look through, though they used it for vases, bottles, and beads; and that the "glass" in the apostle's mind is a looking-glass, which in fact was not glass at all, but polished metal; and that although this did reflect, it reflected very obscurely, so that whatever you saw was seen very "darkly." And his meaning is plain enough. Much as we know and much as we see, we have never yet seen the true glories of our Father's home. We only see the faint reflection: "We behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord." In contrast with others we see: but "we see through a glass, darkly."

There are two things at any rate which will help us to understand the apostle's meaning, and show the force of his expression.

1. All our knowledge of the future state has been conveyed to us in words.

Words are the "glass" that reflect all the glory. Yet how little can words ever tell us of things we have not seen! Have you not often found this out for yourselves? You have gone for the first time into the midst of scenery entirely new, looked upon the stormy ocean from some lofty cliff, climbed a snow-clad alpine peak, or visited some fairy glen. It was all described to you before you saw it for yourself. All that word-painting could do to prepare you for what you were to expect to see was done. But when you saw with your own eyes, the longer you

looked and the more you drank in the wonders and glories of what was a new world to you, the more deeply did you feel how poor were the best chosen words to tell the half of what you saw. And if this be true of earthly scenery, how much more true must it be of heaven? All words must fail: all pictures are unreal. The darkened camera is not more unlike the outside world that it so strikingly reflects, nor the painted sun in Turner's finest pictures less like the sun when shining in the heavens, than all the words we can employ or all the pictures we can paint fall short of the glorious reality of our eternal home. We see; but it is through a glass, darkly.

2. The revelation of heaven has been made to us under the imagery of earth.

The descriptions of heaven are familiar enough to you all. The gates of pearl, the streets of gold, the jewelled foundations, the wall of jasper and sea of glass, the tree and the river of life, are all household words. We have often pictured to ourselves the saints in their white robes, with their palm branches in their hands, their crowns upon their heads, and the name of God upon their foreheads. And we have joined with heart and soul in the song,—

> "When shall these eyes Thy heaven-built walls
> And pearly gates behold,
> Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
> And streets of shining gold?"

And yet how faint a picture must this be of heaven!

They are earthly every one. There is nothing really heavenly about them. Even the word heaven itself is but man's best attempt to assist his own imagination to picture to himself, by means of things that are visible, the world unseen. The pearls, and crowns, and palms, have all their meaning, yet they are but the faint imagery by which we try to climb by an earthly pathway to our heavenly home. They tell us all that we could understand. For the rest we must be content to wait. No earthly words or earthly figures could ever show us the reality or tell us all.

> "Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day and cease to be,
> They are but broken lights of Thee,
> And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

We see ; but it is through a glass, darkly.

III.—*The Perfect Sight we shall have hereafter.*

1. We shall then see "face to face."

It is a great thing for us to reach even the height to which we have attained. We have never seen the Lord. Yet, "not having seen, we love." Even what words can tell has drawn us to Him by cords of indissoluble love. But who does not feel that if our love to Him be true, an hour in His presence would be like the opening of the eyes of the blind, and fill us with all the ecstatic delight of Peter, when he said "It is good to be here," and would gladly have stayed for ever on the mount? And so, again, we have not

seen the home above, where spirits of the just and the church of the first-born dwell. Neither Paul's wondrous flight, nor John's celestial vision has been vouchsafed to us. Yet what we know, though only told in words, has been enough to attract us to that home on high. There have been times when we have longed to leave the world behind, and it has been heaven on earth to sit in solitude and let our mind wander at its own sweet will amid the peaceful pictures of that better land. Yes, and there has been many a dying Christian who has found in what we already know enough to fill his heart with divinest rapture, and help him without fanaticism to adopt as his own those well-known words of Pope's favourite ode,—

"The world recedes ; it disappears !
Heaven opens on my eyes ! my ears
With sounds seraphic ring :
Lend, lend your wings ! I mount ! I fly !
O grave ! where is thy victory ?
O death ! where is thy sting ?"

And yet how infinitely superior to all that words can reveal would be one hour's sight of heaven ! This we shall have at last "when that which is perfect is come." Now we see in a glass, then "face to face." Face to face with all the realities of the spiritual world, with all the things we have longed to enjoy and all the mysteries we have so earnestly wished to solve. Face to face with friends well known and loved ; and with many a friend as true as they, whom

we did not love because we could not know them here. Face to face with all the best and greatest of the earth, who here were so often mistaken and unknown. Face to face with Christ Himself, no longer beheld in a glass, or only heard of by the hearing of the ear, but seen in all the glory that once charmed His own disciples and all the love that so quickly won their hearts ; the God more manifest than ever, and seen by us without a veil between. All this we shall see, not in a glass, but face to face.

2. We shall understand what we see.

Now we see "darkly ;" or, as the word literally means, "in a riddle." The imperfection of our knowledge is occasioned not merely by the fact that the revelation is obscure, but by the limitation of our own faculties. "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." Like the disciples we can ask questions enough; but we are unable to receive the answer. We are surrounded by insoluble enigmas instigating inquiry, stimulating curiosity, but leaving us in the dark still. The mystery will cease, the enigma be solved. Even here sometimes a sudden light will flash on questions that had once seemed hopelessly obscure, and light up fields of beauty that had long been covered by a thick impenetrable mist. And thus when once the light of heaven falls on the broad fields of truth which have so long been hidden from our eyes, all mist will pass away, and with the eternal sunlight of God, and minds emancipated from

their earthly bondage, we shall see face to face, and know as we are known.

Not, indeed, that there will be nothing to learn. Revelation does not exhaust the whole field of truth. It rather quickens perception, and stimulates inquiry. Here in the vast fields of science, the discovery that first brings the botanist face to face with the true law of a plant or flower, opens up a boundless field, while every new discovery only seems to lead into a wider plain. And we cannot imagine that it is otherwise in heaven. A finite mind will always find unfathomed depths of wisdom in the works and ways of the infinite God. No mind will die of inanition in heaven, or remain inactive for want of something more to learn. We shall see face to face, and know as we are known. As we advance step by step we shall see clearly all that we meet with in the great universe of God, and understand whatever we may see. But there will always be depths we have not fathomed, and heights to which we have not climbed. And of all the "living fountains of water to which the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead us," none will yield greater delight or more constant employment than the ever-flowing stream that takes its rise in "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

"Now we see through a glass, darkly"—we know but little of the glory that is to be revealed. But we know enough to make us desire to share that glory,

and quite enough to show us the way. The Christ who is the centre, the light and life of heaven, is now the way, the truth, and the life. Believe in Him, obey His call, follow His guidance, and He will lead you by the right way to His eternal home.

"There shall we see His face,
And never, never sin,
There from the river of His grace
Drink endless pleasures in."

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 3.

THE announcement of John, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," was one for which many were looking, and all were in some way prepared. Prophets and psalmists had alike foreseen the advent of a mighty king, whose name was to endure for ever, to be continued as long as the sun, whose dominion should be an everlasting dominion. Daniel had foretold the early days of this kingdom as like the cutting of a stone from the side of a mountain, whereas at last it should cover the whole earth. The Jews were full of excited expectation, for they were all looking for it soon to appear. Even the Gentiles had caught a little of the fever, for the opinion had spread through the Empire that some great man was to rise in Judea and become supreme ruler in the earth. In the midst of this excitement John suddenly appeared, in that traditional prophetic dress which had been so familiar to the fathers, and declared that His kingdom was at hand. The whole nation ran wild with uncontrollable delight, and flocked in crowds to that baptism in the

Jordan which he declared to be an essential preliminary to their part in the kingdom. The excitement had scarcely had time to subside when Jesus appeared. His baptism over and His temptation at an end, He proceeded to lay the foundation for His kingdom by gathering together three or four fishermen who lived near the Sea of Galilee. He then proceeded with His first great work, healing diseases in divers places, and thus attracted a number of followers, who called Him their Rabbi and were looked upon as His disciples. It was they whom He gathered round Him on the high ground that skirts the Sea of Tiberias, to listen to His celebrated Sermon on the Mount. In the very first words He answered the questions that agitated every heart and were ready to burst from every lip,—What kind of kingdom are we to look for? How are we to get ready for it? Who will the subjects of this kingdom of heaven be? The foundation of all His teaching, His first official public utterance upon record, an utterance as much in force to-day as when He first delivered it, was this: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I.—Notice *the Nature of the Kingdom to which Christ refers.*

The expression "kingdom of heaven" had become a familiar one, probably from the time when Daniel said "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom," and

Christ adopted it. The words are often misunderstood, and regarded as applying not to a kingdom on earth, but to a kingdom in heaven. I do not think that there is a single passage in which it applies to heaven, except as the continuation of the kingdom on earth. It is a kingdom of heaven, because, instead of springing up like other kingdoms by the direct operation of earthly laws and the use of earthly powers, it is introduced directly from heaven, founded by One who came down from heaven, introducing the spirit and rule of heaven, and leading all its subjects to an inheritance in heaven.

It is on earth, but not an earthly kingdom. This was the great mistake of the Jews. They could not distinguish the one from the other. Their only notion of a kingdom was derived from the earthly kingdoms they saw around them. And because there was nothing in the kingdom of Christ resembling these, they would not believe that the kingdom of heaven had been established at all. And those who did believe soon made as great a mistake as they, by the repeated attempt to make the kingdom of heaven resemble as much as possible the kingdoms of the world.

The nature of His kingdom Christ points out here, and He never ceased to reiterate the fact. It is a spiritual kingdom. It has to do with men's spirits; it is for those who are poor in spirit that His kingdom has come.

It would, indeed, be a great mistake to suppose that the blessings which the kingdom of heaven has introduced into the world are spiritual blessings only, or that it is with these alone that Christians concern themselves. Just as Christ through all His life was occupied with the body as well as the soul—feeding the hungry, healing the sick, comforting the widow, giving sight to the blind, instructing the ignorant, and raising the dead—so has the progress of the kingdom of heaven been ever attended by material blessings, so many and so great that the one can never be separated from the other. Though it has never failed to hold up the crown of life and point to the eternal inheritance, the salvation of the soul, as the one thing to be desired ; it has scattered flowers in its path, which have made earth more like to Eden than ever it was before. The very cannibal has felt its gentle influence, and, laying aside his murderous weapons, has clothed himself, and claimed admission to the confederation of the world. The slave has been touched as by a magic spell, so that his fetters have been loosed and slavery declared a crime. The prison-house of woman has been opened by its all-powerful key, and wherever the kingdom of heaven has spread, her cruel oppression has ceased, and she has received the freedom and the equality which God designed. If want and suffering have not ceased, the fountains of sympathy have been opened, until in every land where the Gospel has taken root, side by side

with the Churches of Christ there have never been wanting schools for the ignorant, homes for the destitute, refuges for the fallen, asylums for orphans, hospitals for the sick, and institutions for the dumb and blind. Under its influence man has ever risen, homes have improved, social comforts have increased, knowledge has spread more widely, and the sum of human happiness has been largely multiplied. It does not transform the cottage into a palace, make the poor man rich and the sick man well. But let the blessings of the kingdom of heaven find their way into any heart and any home, and it effects a transmutation as great as that of which alchemist ever dreamed, giving to the cottage a new light, which the palace might envy, and enriching the poor man with stores of good of which the rich man might well be proud. The blessings of the kingdom are not confined to its power within the soul, but it still blesses and brightens all the earth to a faithful Christian man.

Yet the one thing with which it has to do is the spirit in man, and spiritual blessings are those which Christ ever loves to bestow. They who wanted *only* material good never came to Christ for that. But they who sought first the kingdom of God have ever found that other things were added. The blessings of His kingdom are pardon for the sinner, righteousness for the culprit, holiness for the corrupt, eternal life for those that were dead. The great gift of Christ

is spiritual life. He sends His Spirit to make us spiritual men, to give us spiritual worth, and endow us with spiritual rewards. This was, and is, and will be while the world lasts, the great want of man; and wherever the Gospel of Christ is received this is its invariable fruit. The pathway of Christ was marked with these results in those who followed Him. The progress of the Church carried these blessings to the darkest and most distant parts of the world. And still it comes with life from the dead, spiritual life, eternal life, to all who truly enter the kingdom. Over that life death has no power. The body will lie lifeless in the grave, but the spirit, quickened by Christ, will never die, and in the glories of the Paradise above will first appear in all its fulness the blessedness of the poor in spirit, who entered on earth the kingdom of heaven.

II.—*The Persons to whom this Kingdom is promised.*

"Poor in spirit." Notice, it is not poor in purse. Poverty itself is no plea. There is a frequent disposition to imagine that there is some law of compensation, according to which poverty, affliction, suffering, constitute a title to salvation. No error could be greater. All the evils, the sin, the pride, the enmity, the hardness and indifference which are most fatal to spiritual life, may flourish in the depth of poverty and affliction quite as much as in the midst of prosperity and wealth.

Notice too that it is poor in spirit, not poor-spirited. The Church of Christ has included the noblest, bravest, strongest men that the world has ever seen. They were not poor-spirited men who stood before rulers with the dungeon in sight, and said, "We must obey God rather than man;" who knelt down amid the stones that were to take their lives, and prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" who went on their way preaching with the martyr's death in view, and saying, "None of these things move me;" who went without flinching to the lions, to the cross, and to the fire for Christ. Men like Luther and Ridley, Carey and Williams, Moffat and Patteson, have not been poor-spirited men. And would you find the noblest and most daring, the firmest and most self-denying, the bravest and most spirited, in the best sense of the word, you must seek them in the kingdom of heaven. Poor-spirited men will neither win nor spread the kingdom.

By the poor in spirit Christ clearly meant those whose poverty consisted in the want of spiritual blessings and spiritual life. These He came to bestow; blessed, then, were those who needed them: the kingdom of heaven contained them all. And theirs was the kingdom of heaven.

But do not all men come within this circle? Are not all poor in spirit? In fact, they are so, but consciously poor they are not, and the most destitute will never seek the kingdom till he feels that he is

poor. Here is the great anomaly. The blind man bemoans his blindness, the sick man mourns his want of health, the poor bewails his poverty, the starving pines with hunger. But men may be spiritually blind, dying with the sin that has corrupted their soul, perishing for want of the bread of life, and say, We see; we are well; we have need of nothing. There may be great spiritual need without the smallest feeling of spiritual want. It is not they whom Christ pronounces blessed, but they who feel their destitution, who know that they have no eternal life abiding in them; they who feel the want, the longing, the craving desire; they who know their helpless inability, and with earnest hearts are ready to say, "Lord, save; we perish!" Yes, they are blessed, for there is One ready to save—a full supply for those who hunger, eternal life for those ready to die; the kingdom of heaven is at hand, for them to enter. It is already theirs. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

III.—*The Contrast which such a Promise suggests.*

1. In the persons mentioned. The kingdom of heaven was at hand; all were expecting it, and most men had read their title clear. The Pharisee was sure, because of his righteousness, to have an exalted place in the kingdom. The Sadducee, though he had no belief in a future life, had no doubt whatever that his respectability would secure to him a good standing in

the kingdom. And the man of wealth would have no fear but that with his money he could make his calling and election sure. Not one of these did Christ set down to even the lowest place. And this was the head and front of His offending. They are all passed by, not for what they possess, but in spite of all they possess ; and that for the simple reason that while they are rich, respectable, and in their way religious, they are not poor in spirit, conscious of their greatest want and deepest need. And, to their great amazement, the leper, the Galilean, the publican, the sinner, are told that the kingdom is for them, and the publicans and harlots press into the kingdom of heaven before them. This was the great contrast between the expectation and the reality.

And there is the same contrast still. In other forms, pride of wealth, of intellect, of respectability, of training, still serve as hindrances to that conscious poverty of spirit so needful to an entrance into the kingdom. We may not admit it, but there is ever a lurking danger lest our Christian name, our places of worship, our knowledge of the Bible, our correct lives, our occasional feeling, should be looked upon as titles to a place in the kingdom, and while "neither cold nor hot" we should never really be made to feel that we still need to pass from death to life, that if we are not born again, if Christ has not given us spiritual life, we have no title whatever, and are far away from the kingdom. Still is the fact too often repeated that

while the moral in life keep "not far from the kingdom," but never enter, the publicans and sinners, when brought to a real consciousness of their need, press the first into the kingdom.

2. In the blessings promised. The hope of the kingdom took one form. It was the ambitious longing for power, for plenty, for renown, for glory. The vision was always before them of David's conquests, Solomon's splendours, the yoke bound upon Edom, the overthrow of the Assyrian; of victory, and of spoil. And this they expected in their great Messiah's reign.

Contrast could not be greater. His own humility, poverty, and weakness, were opposed to all their expectations. And when He spoke of spiritual blessings to be given to the poor in spirit as constituting the sum and substance of His kingdom, they turned away in disdain. Of what use to talk of spiritual life and poverty of spirit to men whose heads were full of visionary dreams of thrones and palaces, of marches to certain victory and triumphal processions on their return, of crowned heads prostrate at their feet and conquered territory allotted to the victors, of more than Solomon's splendour surrounding their Prince, and the reflected glory irradiating themselves? How could they stoop from their eagle-flight of brilliant fancy to listen to the words that met their ear, of hunger and thirst, purity of heart, and poverty of spirit, as the only steps to the kingdom?

And so now, with all the change that Christ's teaching has effected, and though none dream of the kingdom of Christ as a kingdom of conquest, wealth, and splendour, there is just the same fear that these should still be thought the highest good, and all the heart be fixed on them. And just as truly might we ask today, What is the use of preaching of spiritual blessings and spiritual life, of poverty of spirit and the kingdom of heaven, to men whose minds are full of the desire to be rich and great, to be filled with good of earth and not of heaven? This mighty contrast kept them out of the kingdom, and many there are whom it keeps out still.

3. In the assurance given. "Theirs is the kingdom." They dreamed of the kingdom they were to receive, the glory, the conquest, and passed Christ contemptuously by, leaving Him to the publican and sinner and the poor in spirit, whom He was so ready to bless. Let them have His kingdom, they were welcome to it all. Years rolled away, and their kingdom was still in the clouds. A few more years and Jerusalem had vanished, and they were fugitives and wanderers. Centuries have passed, their kingdom is as far off as ever. But the kingdom of the poor in spirit never waned. The fall of kingdoms and the shock of empires never made its foundations tremble. Fire and sword have been powerless against it. It has been spreading, and is spreading still: strongest in its might when poorest in appearance.

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The kingdom of the poor in spirit is still on its way to conquer all the world.

They dreamed of wealth and worth, of fame and glory, and passed Christ by because He promised none of these. And what was their exchange? A few years passed—their glory was their shroud, their fame the blackest deed that ever disgraced the surface of the earth, their wealth had passed to other hands, and the ladder of ambition by which they sought to climb to heaven had been reversed, and led them down to hell.

The poor in spirit had no such dreams. It was enough for them to follow Jesus, and feel the newborn peace and joy which came to all who sought and found eternal life in Him. They asked no more. But He led them, by a way they knew not, to Calvary, to the grave. And now they are before the throne. The downward ladder was reversed for them, and led them up to shining heights. And there they are, clad in light and deathless bloom. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And still the law holds good. We, too, may dream of pleasure, power, and wealth. And it may be nothing but a dream. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. All may prove deceptive. In every hope we may be disappointed. An hour's changing scene may so reverse your present prospects that every expectation may be swept away. The cup may be dashed from your lips, the bubble burst in the

handling. The worm in the bud may be at work already. Death may be digging your grave, while you are enlarging your borders, and planning for years that never will come. And though every hope were realised, all this must have an end. It cannot last. The golden bowl will be broken. You, too, will go to your long home—the home of the man who laid up treasures for himself, who never thought of laying up treasures in heaven. All is uncertain here; and when all we wish is in our grasp it crumbles into dust.

The poor in spirit can never lose their possession and never be disappointed of their hopes. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The blessedness that comes from spiritual life may be long deferred, but it never fails to come at last. And when it comes it is never exhausted. That mine is never worked out, that investment never fails. All other life must droop and die; but spiritual life in Christ is everlasting. The glory of the world may throw it into the shade. It may seem insipid to the worldly man. But when the shadow of life's evening falls, its glory never is obscured, though you must cross the valley to the height beyond, and pass the pearly gate, to know the full blessedness of the poor in spirit, the glory of the kingdom of heaven.

THE SIGHT OF GOD.

"*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"
MATT. v. 8.

THE Beatitudes, with which Christ began His ministry, describe the effects which His own work was designed to produce on earth. They do not relate to heaven alone, but to blessings to be realised by His followers here, as foretastes of the more perfect blessedness to come. One of these blessings, as He here told His disciples, was to be such a sight of God as would bring a sure and rich reward to those who sought it with purity of heart.

Under the Old Testament, the sight of God was not only a source of alarm, but was represented as a thing to be especially feared. Thus Jacob said, "How dreadful is this place;" Manoah, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God;" and Isaiah, "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And God Himself said to Moses, "There shall no man see Me and live." Then the only effect of seeing God was to produce a consciousness of sin and fill the heart with terror. All this was now to be changed, and the sight of God was to be the reward of purity, the source of blessedness, and of the highest joy.

In these words Christ shows that the invisibility of God is partly occasioned by the heart of man. It arises not simply from the secrecy of God's nature, but from the incapacity of man's; not from the absolute impossibility of His being seen, but from our inability to see Him. The occasion shows that it is not absolute purity that Christ refers to, for such was nowhere to be found, but to that simple-hearted sincerity which He extolled in Nathanael, which led the earnest seeker to watch with open heart and open eye for His own coming. Perfect purity He was ready to bestow, but perfect purity He could not require. To all who came to Him with sincere or teachable minds He gave the open eye with which they could see God.

I.—One of the plainest doctrines of the Bible is *the invisibility of God.*

He is "the King invisible." Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." He is one "whom no man hath seen or can see." "No man hath seen God at any time." This must contain a truth in perfect agreement with the words of Christ—words which he expressed in another form when He said to Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

The declaration of the invisibility of God was intended as a safeguard against idolatry, and a warning not even to think of God as a being of whom it was possible to make any likeness, or as one whose nature

resembled the nature of His creatures, whose very form was a proof that they were confined in space and limited in power.

His invisibility indicates His nature. The idea of light suggests at once materiality. The attributes of matter are all such as we perceive with our senses—colour, shape, or taste. This is not the case with a single attribute belonging to the soul. Thought and feeling, knowledge and wisdom, love and pity, desire and hope—these are as real as colour or taste ; but we cannot see them. And when we read of the invisibility of God, and read also that "God is a spirit," the one simple lesson taught by this is, that we are not to think of God as possessing the attributes which material things present, but those which we find not in body but in mind.

But this is not all that the invisibility of God implies. It refers not merely to the fact that as our eyes cannot see even our own minds, so they cannot see Him ; but to the fact that from the condition of our own nature we cannot comprehend His nature, His works, His purpose, or His plans. Whatever men have known of God, there has always been infinitely more that they did not know. Whatever has been revealed of His works, and by His works, there is much more behind the veil. Whatever He has told us of His purpose and His glorious plans, their very magnitude, their stupendous glory, have rendered it impossible that we should comprehend the whole. And even

with the continued researches of many a thousand years, and the full-orbed glory with which in Christ the Sun has risen upon the world — though we know His love, His forgiving mercy, His design to save — though we can call Him Father and do know Him — yet the more we study, and the nearer we go, the more boundless is the ocean, the more unfathomable the depths of His power and love. Still His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past-finding out. And instead of dogmatising, as we are too prone to do, about His purposes, as though everything were known, our wisest plan would ever be to adopt the humbler words of Job, "Lo, these are parts of His ways, but what a whisper is heard of Him! and the thunder of His power who can understand?" He has come near, and, like a father, drawn us to Himself; but still we have but caught a faint and passing glimpse. No man hath seen Him. He is still the King invisible, whom no man hath seen nor can see.

II.—Yet this invisibility does not prevent even *a visible manifestation of God.*

There are many ways in which that which is invisible may be clearly seen. The hidden forces at work beneath the earth may be seen and heard in the rumbling earthquake and the blazing volcano. The invisible forces of magnetism and electricity may show themselves in the moving needle, the flash of lightning, or the brilliant aurora. The fertilising powers

of the ground are invisible as well as hidden, yet they make themselves manifest in the fields of grass and crops of corn. Nothing is more mysterious or more truly invisible than the life of any plant or tree. Yet it can come to light in buds and leaves, in flowers and ripening fruits. And more than this: though thought be invisible, the thought of a man is often quite as visible in his face as if it were engraved on tables of stone. Feeling may be invisible, yet you can see it in look and gesture, as plainly as if you could see the mind. Purpose cannot be seen, yet the very eye will often manifest the invisible purpose of the soul. Things may be invisible and yet be seen. And thus may the God invisible show Himself to man. He has done so, and that in many ways. The heavens declare His glory. Everything that God has made shows something of Himself. The dazzling sun and twinkling stars, the falling rain and glistening dew, the flashing lightning and boiling volcano, the placid lake and boisterous sea, the fierce hurricane and gentle breeze, the spreading cedar and creeping moss—everything that God has made is an expression of something that there is in God. Into all He does He puts something of Himself, and "the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being perceived in the things that are made." In all human history there is something of God to be seen. When He "made man in His own image" He put more of Himself into man, revealed more of Himself through man than through anything

else that he had made. And in all his wondrous history God has been working and has been seen. In the thorns and briars that followed sin; in the flood as well as the ark; in the brimstone and fire that overwhelmed the cities of the plain, as much as in the escape of Lot from the flame; in the captivity of Israel as much as in the possession of the promised land; in the rise and fall of many an empire; in the raising up of great leaders, enlightened teachers; in many a man whom the world has despised, and of whom the world was not worthy, God has been seen. The invisible God has not hidden Himself, but in ten thousand ways has shown Himself to man.

More plainly still in His Word, where He reveals Himself in ways almost as plain as when He visited the tent of Abraham, spoke to Moses from the bush, and showed Isaiah His glory. He spoke to Moses face to face, and the record of what he saw and heard formed the first opening of that book of books to which the world has owed and does still owe far more than to all books besides, simply because there is to be found within it so much more of God. In that Word, God the invisible was plainly revealed. Into the men who wrote it He put His Spirit; and in the words they wrote, all who had pure hearts and open eyes could see the Invisible.

III.—*But God was never fully seen except in Christ.*

In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead. He

was the bright radiance of the Father's glory, the express image of His person. The Spirit was not given by measure to Him.

It is to Himself, and the visible manifestation of God in Him, that Christ is referring here. He stood before them "God manifest in the flesh," and without reserve He could say, "I and my Father are one, and he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

But observe in what that sight of God really consisted. It was not in the sight of His face and form. There were multitudes who saw Him who yet saw nothing but a poor man, a deceiver, an agent of Satan, and nothing of God. Even His own disciples, with all their love, their reverence, were very long before they could so discern the attributes of God in the features of man, that any one could say, "My Lord and my God."—Nor in the power He possessed. His miracles were not done in a corner. Yet many followed Him from place to place, saw many mighty works, and yet left Him, either with their own solution, or without any attempt to explain them, and as far as ever from seeing God.—Nor in His words; for all heard them: they were spoken on the mountain top, by the sea shore, in the temple. Crowds listened to the words, and scarcely any saw God. The manifestation of God was in that love, that wisdom, that compassion, that forgiving tenderness, that self-denying endurance, that pure life, yet earnest endeavour to seek and save the sinner, which never ended till it bore

the cross, and never will end till the whole world is saved. This was the sight of God, a sight such as the world had never had before. And it was only they whose hearts would let them look away from all their dreams of outward grandeur and high estate, and fix their thoughts on this till it shone out full-orbed in all its divine celestial splendour, who ever did see God.

In Christ God could be seen. There was not a word. He spoke, a thought He uttered, a deed that He performed, that did not show the God within—"The Father that dwelleth in Me." There was not a look, a gesture, that was not perfectly Divine. In dealing with Zaccheus with all his wealth, and the blind Bartimeus with all his poverty; when surrounded by flattering multitudes crying "Hosannah;" or hostile priests crying, "Away with Him," He was ever the same, and everything displayed the God in Him.

And in Christ God could be fully seen. All the attributes of God were manifest in Christ: His power and wisdom, His holiness and love, His hatred of sin, His compassion for the sinner; the fulness of the Godhead was there, and they who had truly seen Him had seen the Father also.

And still in Christ, mirrored in His word, and carrying on through His Church the great work of salvation, may God be seen by the pure in heart.

And in heaven itself the great company of the redeemed will need no fuller revelation, and desire no clearer sight of God, than that which they have in

Jesus Christ, in whom they will ever see the face of God.

IV.—*But even in Christ the sight of God must ever be dependent upon the heart of man.*

We can well believe that, to the outward eye, there was nothing that distinguished Christ from others. The features which in themselves bespoke the divinity within were doubtless marked so deeply with the lines that sorrow, conflict, poverty, and exposure would produce that they would never strike a careless eye. And in the crowd that followed Him, few looked beneath the surface, though they so often marvelled at His works and words. They looked on all His works, they saw Him raise the dead, and yet did not see God. That which was most Divine escaped their notice, and He was hidden from their eye. This was the case with many who even thought He was the promised Christ. His words and works did force from them the questions, "When Christ cometh, will He do greater works?" "Is not this He?" And yet they never really knew Him, or saw in Him the Son of God. The sight of God is something far different from this. The eye may see, the ear may hear, the mind may accept the irresistible conclusion, and yet the heart may hinder the sight of God. In His works and His word, in the Gospel and in Christ Himself, notwithstanding the clearness and fulness of the revelation made, God may still remain invisible.

The heavens declare His glory ; yet the most careful students of His works in heaven and earth may see everything but God. The wondrous skill, the mighty power, the brilliant glory, and the order undisturbed —these they cannot fail to see ; yet God may be unseen.

And the students of His word may be just as blind. That word does reveal even more than His works ; and there, as in a glass, we behold the glory of the Lord ; yet many never see Him there. They may admit and admire the wisdom and beauty that every page contains ; they may assent without reserve to every fact that it records ; they may interpret its prophecies, systematise its doctrines, and expound its laws, and yet be so engrossed by the letter, so blind to the spirit, that God shall never be seen.

And, stranger still, the students of Christ Himself may fail to see Him. They may profess profoundest admiration of His wisdom, goodness, and power. They may stand with mingled admiration and awe beside His cradle and His cross. They may enter with reverent footsteps Gethsemane, or the grave. They may watch again with elated imagination His ascent to heaven. They may be ready with assertions of their unquestioned faith in His divinity, and with unanswerable demonstration of the fact. And yet even to them the God may be invisible. They may never, even in Christ, have seen God. The sight of God depends on heart, and not on head ; on purity of heart, not on

clearness of mind or keenness of intellect; and many a learned man who has seen his way most clearly through all the mysteries of Christ's doctrine, has never found his way to that which forms the life, the centre, the soul of all—the sight of God in Christ; while the untutored soul, to whom all dogmas were unintelligible mysteries, has looked through them with an earnest heart, and in the first sight of Christ been ready with instinctive faith to say, "My Lord and my God."

See, then, from these words of Christ, what we have most carefully to avoid. As when we look at nature, the very wonders tempt us on, not to the God who makes them, but farther and farther away, so in this word, and in the work of Christ Himself, the same danger besets us all. Let us beware of this. See to it, that whether you look upon the distant star, or pluck the flower at your feet, you are not content with the beauty of the work, and have no eye for Him whose wondrous workmanship they all display.

And as you turn to the broad field of Christ's truth, take care that the words, the facts, the truths, do not so fetter your thought and fix your attention that you are kept by them away from Christ, and fail after all to see God.

See, too, what it is you really need. The pure heart is not the faultless perfect heart. Nathanael had not that. The woman of Samaria had not that. Zaccheus had not such purity as that, much less the woman that was a sinner. Yet they all saw God.

Under that humble form they saw the love, the goodness that assured them God had come near to them; their earnest hearts opened their eyes, and they saw God. Nor can it be otherwise now. The divinity of Christ is a glorious truth, the keystone of the Gospel. We cannot hold it too firmly. And yet we may waste both time and strength in efforts to demonstrate the divinity of our Lord. For what is needed most is not the conviction which demonstration will produce, but that clear insight which comes from the heart and not from the brain. A man may trace with careful attention the most conclusive argument which logic can construct till he is compelled to admit his defeat, and, with the frank confession that Christ was Divine, go away untouched, unblessed, without a single sight of God.

The blessedness of which Christ is speaking here comes not in such a way as this. It is that clear undoubting vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ which steals like softest morning light upon the earnest, anxious, contrite heart when looking at the cross where Jesus died; it sees in that loving face, that bleeding side, the full assurance, the true expression of God's love to Him; and, falling at His feet, with joyful confidence can say, "My Lord and my God."

ST. PETER AND THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM.

"*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"—MATT. xvi. 19.

THE contrasts in human character are nowhere more strikingly exhibited than in the two attitudes assumed by Peter in this chapter. He is the first confessor of Christ; but he is also the first opposer of Christ. He proclaims Christ's divinity, and then stands in Christ's way. He is the Rock on which Christ builds His Church, the possessor of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the Satan whom Christ orders to get behind Him.

Up to this time the disciples had all followed Jesus with strong convictions that He was the Messiah, but yet with very vague notions as to what the Messiah Himself was to be. And Christ had led them on step by step, from truth to truth, waiting for the fuller light to burst upon their minds. The people generally had also vague expectations of a coming Messiah, and there was sufficient curiosity afloat concerning Christ

for Him to be the constant subject of conversation. Jesus allowed His disciples to move freely about among the people, joining them in their talk, expressing their own opinions, and eliciting their views in return; and now and then He sent them on special missions, and on their return would inquire what notions the people were forming, and what they were saying, about Himself.

He had just been asking the disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" and had received the reply, that some thought He was John the Baptist, some that He was Elijah, and some that He was Jeremiah, or, at any rate, one of the prophets. And, turning suddenly to His disciples, He said, "And what think ye? Whom say ye that I am?" Without a moment's hesitation Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Such a declaration meant far more then than the same words could possibly mean now; far more than the words of Andrew, "We have found the Messiah;" or the exclamation of Nathanael, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God." It was the clear utterance of a faith slowly acquired; the expression of knowledge that had been steadily increasing day by day; the first proof that Peter had really seen right through that humble human veil and discerned the divinity that dwelt within. And the Saviour, accepting his testimony, addresses him at once in these striking words: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but My Father

which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

There are three things contained in these words: the announcement of the apostle's inspiration; the assurance that on that rock Christ would build His Church; and the promise that He would give to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. There is no difficulty in understanding the first assertion; and we are not surprised to find the Saviour declaring that such an insight into His own true nature could only be gained through the inspiration of His Father. But there have been the gravest disputes about the meaning of both the second and the third. Controversy has wrapped them in the densest mist, and ecclesiastical pretensions have made many afraid to inquire what they really mean. And yet if we will only lay all prejudice aside, and take the words in their simplest meaning, there is nothing about them so very mysterious or strange.

The general idea with which men start is that Christ here assigns to Peter an absolute position, and confers upon him a supreme and exclusive authority. This is the assumption of the Romish Church, and on this it has based the most absurd and arrogant and illogical conclusions that have ever been forced upon

the Church or the world. Peter the rock and possessor of the keys; the Church of Rome the lawful heir of Peter's seat: therefore, the power of the keys the exclusive possession of the priesthood of Rome. But granting that Christ here assigns to Peter an absolute position, this passage must not be separated from the rest of the chapter. A very short time elapses before Peter assumes another attitude, and Jesus calls him Satan now. The one is as absolute as the other. If he is the absolute head of the Church, the absolute possessor of the keys of the kingdom, he is also Satan, the antagonist and opponent of his Lord; and we are shut up to this absurd conclusion —that Christ builds His Church upon Satan, and gives the keys of the kingdom to his greatest foe. Clearly, then, all was made dependent upon the attitude he assumed, and upon his continuing in the position in which he was standing then. He is the rock on which Christ builds; the holder of the keys binding or loosing the gate of the kingdom; but he may also become the antagonist, resisting and opposing his Lord.

And what is it that Christ confers? He calls him a rock, the rock on which He builds; and then promises the keys. The former I know is doubted, but I see not why. Paul tells us distinctly that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets;" and when John saw the perfect Church under the symbol of a city, he saw in the twelve foundations

the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. In just the same sense we may take the words which Christ uses here: not Peter the primate; nor Peter the man, who might be a confessor to-day and an opponent to-morrow; but Peter the first to discern with all clearness and confess with all boldness the Messiahship and divinity of his Lord; and not Peter alone, but Peter the first of all the twelve to have his name inscribed upon a foundation stone. "Thou art Cephas, and on this Cephas" will I build my Church. These must have been the words that Christ employed. Thou, Cephas, a rock, now rugged and unhewn, needing still much tooling and polishing, art nevertheless a living stone, whose clear confession has made thee fit to be the first stone in the foundation on which I build, and the leader of a long line of living stones to be built up into an impregnable Church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

And in the same sense does He give him the promise of the keys: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

I.—*What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?*

Many different explanations have been given of these words. Some have imagined the Apostle Peter seated at the gate of heaven itself, with plenary authority to open or make fast the door. Some understand

by it the absolute power to decide who shall and who shall not be admitted to the kingdom—in other words, who shall or who shall not be saved. Others suppose the right to be here conferred to draw up infallible creeds, and decree rites and ceremonies for all time, that should be binding everywhere and binding upon all. And others, again, regard authority to administer sacraments as the key which none can lawfully or successfully use but the true successors of St. Peter himself. Against all these we have the simple fact that no such power was ever exercised, no such power ever claimed, much less transmitted to successors.

The first thing to be settled is the simple question, What is the key of the kingdom? What will open the door to let any man in, or lock the door to keep any man out? The word key is figurative. No one supposes that Christ here refers to a literal key of brass or iron. The use of a key is simple enough: to open for admission or to lock for exclusion. But the nature of the key depends entirely upon the door to be opened or the admission secured. A material door must be opened by a material key. The gate into a city may be locked or unlocked by such a key. But if I want to enter a kingdom, to become a naturalised subject even of an earthly king, a very different key is required. To discover, then, what is the key, we need only to determine what it is that will remove the barrier and let us in. Whatever will admit to the kingdom of heaven, that, and that only, is the key of the kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven was a phrase well understood. The Jews were all looking for it, and they had all their own ideas concerning the key. Some thought descent from Abraham would surely open the door; others believed that at any rate tithes and fasting would be sure to make the gate swing upon its hinges. And to all, circumcision was an indispensable key. Yet Christ tells them plainly that none of these will admit to the kingdom; not one of these will open the door: "They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves shall be thrust out." The kingdom which Christ had come to establish was one that could never be opened and entered by such keys as these. "I am the door; by Me if any man enter he shall go in and out and find pasture." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Peter had really, perhaps unconsciously, lighted upon the key; although at the time he had little idea how great a treasure, or how mighty a talisman, he held in his possession. That faith in Christ, that insight into His true nature, and that bold, outspoken confession of Christ, these were the keys by which he had not only opened the door for himself, but would hereafter open the door of the kingdom for many others.

Christ confirms the discovery, and tells him in this promise that the day will come when he will be well able to make use of the key. He might, perhaps, need

clearer light and greater boldness before he could open the door to others. But the day would come when, by the same key that had let him in, others would be admitted also. He had but to wait till he could preach Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world—neither afraid of the cross nor ashamed of the Crucified One—and by his preaching to inspire others with the same strong faith that now inspired him, and he would have the keys of the kingdom. For these are the keys that will open the door to any man, and the only keys that will ever unlock the door.

But while they will *loose* they will also *bind;* the same keys that unlock will also lock the faster. Christ prepares him for this. The truth will be a savour of life unto life, but it will also be a savour of death unto death. The same light that gives clearer sight to those who come to the light deepens the darkness of those who love darkness rather than light. Christ cheers him with the assurance that he will be able to let others in; but He also forewarns him that by the very same keys of the kingdom some will be shut out.

II.—*Who are the holders of the keys?*

They are here promised to one man: "I will give unto *thee* the keys." And this has been made the foundation of the most arbitrary assumptions and the most arrogant claims. Priests have laid claim to their

exclusive possession, and have boldly declared that none but they could either hold or use the keys.

The whole question turns upon the capacity in which they were promised to Peter himself. Was it as head of the apostles and primate of the Church? or simply as the possessor and confessor of the truth in Christ? The context plainly answers this. It is all part of the blessedness pronounced for the glorious revelation that he had received. It was Peter standing in the right attitude towards Christ, Peter declaring the great and fundamental truth of the kingdom, to whom the keys were promised. He had not always the keys in his possession. When he stood in Christ's way to hinder His going up to Jerusalem, that was not the way to open the door. When he forsook Him and fled, and then denied with oaths and curses that he had ever known Him, that was not the key. When he was so slow to learn the lesson taught by the descending sheet, and at Antioch refused to meet with Gentiles upon equal terms, he plainly showed that if he possessed the key that opened the door to the Jew he had hardly yet got possession of the key that would open to the Gentiles. And yet with all his reluctance he could not if he would have shut them out.

This was no absolute promise therefore, but one inseparably connected with the light he possessed and the confession he had made. He was soon followed by others, and as each reached the same position of faith, and light, and full confession, he came by irre-

sistible necessity into possession of the keys. There was nothing in the terms on which the promise was made, nothing in the way in which the power was used, that ever limited by any outward lines the number of those who held them. Apostles and pastors, evangelists and teachers, were not the only persons who brought others into the kingdom. When the Church was scattered, the disciples without restriction went everywhere preaching the Gospel; and by the simple preaching of Christ they opened the kingdom wherever they went, and even Gentiles entered in. And the apostles themselves employed no other key. They baptized, but not till the door had been opened and the believer was within the kingdom. They laid their hands upon the disciples' heads, but not till they had already entered by the door. The only key by which they ever loosed the door was to preach Christ and Him crucified; to declare that there was no other name under heaven given among men whereby they could be saved but the name of Jesus Christ; and to call upon all without reserve to repent and believe the Gospel.

That key we have. And who need wish for any other? Every Sunday-school teacher who has himself the knowledge of Christ, and faith in Christ, and is seeking with earnest heart to lead his scholars to Christ, is a holder of the key. Every Christian parent seeking to instil into his children's hearts the love of Christ that fills his own is a possessor of the key. Yes,

every Christian who not only believes in his heart, but with his lips makes confession, and who is seeking with whatever gifts the Lord has conferred upon him to spread His kingdom by winning souls, is as truly in possession of the keys of the kingdom as he could ever have been if the hands of all the apostles had been placed upon his head. You can preach Christ; you can beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; you can even bring them to Christ and into the kingdom. And if in any way you can accomplish this, you must possess the keys of the kingdom.

III.—*How to obtain possession of the keys.*

Those who are interested in establishing an exclusive right have their own way of showing how the keys are to be obtained. The Church of Rome has always been concerned to uphold the strangest fiction of Peter's headship, of her own possession of Peter's chair, and the direct succession of all her duly ordained priests to the power of the keys. And others who renounce all connection with that Church have been equally stedfast in declaring the absolute necessity for regular ordination and an authorised succession in order to secure that power. But the claim is as unfounded and absurd as the fiction itself is easily exposed. Even if the line were unbroken and the direct succession could be demonstrated, it would carry no such power and substantiate no such claim. Not only are the keys what they always were, but all

obtain them as they were first obtained, and keep them as they were first preserved. The key by which Peter opened the kingdom was his knowledge of Christ, his clear insight into the way of salvation, the strength of his own faith in Christ, and the faithfulness and power with which he preached Christ and Him crucified. If a man lack any of these; if he know not the way to be saved; if he be an unbeliever; if he have not the faith that works by love; if a life of sin show that he himself is not saved, he can never open the door. He may be authorised to baptize, and declare with bold but irreverent lips that those whom he has baptized are regenerate; he may have authority to pronounce absolution, and declare with no faltering of speech, "I absolve thee from all thy sins;" he may even lay his hand upon the heads of others and say, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" but his *words* can have no effect. The assertion does not constitute the fact. If there be no faith in Christ, no change of heart, no true repentance, no regeneration by the Holy Spirit before all this; there are none of these when all has been done. The door has not been opened; the baptism has not placed them within the kingdom; they are just what they were before; and ceremonies which have effected no change in them can have made no alteration in their position in relation to the kingdom of God.

The only way to get possession of the keys is to get a fuller and deeper insight into the truth, to get a

stronger faith in Christ ourselves, to be living epistles of Christ, to live so near to Christ as to become more and more filled with the Spirit of Christ, and to acquire the power not only of holding forth the word of life, but of convincing others of sin and persuading them to be reconciled to God. The stronger our faith the clearer our perception; the further our entrance into the kingdom the more shall we be qualified to lead others to Christ and the surer our possession of the keys.

IV.—*What is the power of the keys?*

"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." As these words are frequently interpreted they conferred upon Peter, and through him conferred upon his successors, the arbitrary power to determine at will the eternal destiny of their fellow-men. By administering sacraments, pronouncing absolution, they can at once admit to the kingdom; and, on the other hand, by solemn excommunication, or by refusing sacraments and Christian burial, they can destroy the only chance of obtaining salvation. Is there anything in the face of it more improbable than that God, who desireth not the death of him that dieth, but rather that he should turn unto Him and live, and who would have all men to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, should en-

trust to any mortal sinful man the absolute power, by any act of his own, to bind fast the door and shut others out, or to throw open the door and let others in? Or, could you imagine anything more fearful than the possession of such a power? Picture to yourself Peter, or any other man, endowed with such authority, and conscious that the eternal salvation of those round about him was so absolutely in his power that, by his own arbitrary verdict, he could admit them to the kingdom, or shut them hopelessly and for ever out! The very possession of such a power would be overwhelming indeed. And could anything be more enslaving to those whose eternal destiny was thus made dependent on the mere will of another? It is no wonder that the power of the priesthood and the abject submission of the laity have been the universal characteristics of the Church of Rome. Wherever the people are ignorant enough to believe that their priests are the possessors of this awful power, that on their word and sacraments their eternal condition depends, they cannot but be slaves. And that is not the only Church in which an authorised priesthood lays claim to the exclusive possession of the keys, and is supposed to possess thereby the power to admit to the kingdom of heaven and an equal authority to exclude.

And yet, can anything be simpler than the truth as expounded by the fact? All that is ever really loosed on earth is also loosed in heaven. Eternal results hang upon earthly words! Have you the Gospel of

Christ in your mind and heart, so that you can preach it faithfully, and preach it with effect? Not only can you bring the sinner within the kingdom here, but ensure him a place in the kingdom above. The true conversion, the real regeneration, the new life, the indwelling of the Spirit, to which your preaching has led, are the earnest of an eternal inheritance, the pledge that heaven is open and the salvation sure. If we convert at all we convert for heaven, not merely for earth, and lead to Christ for eternity, not simply for time. God honours the result of our feeblest efforts, and looses the door of heaven to all to whom the door of the kingdom has thus been opened below. From its very nature, "whatsoever is loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

And the result is the same if, instead of loosing, we bind the door. If while we are preaching Christ, and seeking with earnest hearts to bring sinners to Him, our efforts all fail, and the hearts of others are hardened by our words; if through their resistance to the truth, their refusal of salvation, their rejection of the mercy offered, they grow more confirmed in unbelief: then, in spite of all our desires, we have but made the door the faster. And the effect of this must be eternal also. The door that unbelief and hardness of heart thus close and fasten is not only the door of Christ's Church on earth, but the door of heaven too. Our attitude to Christ here determines our attitude for ever. Receive Him, and you are His to all

eternity; reject Him, and when the door is shut for ever you will be shut out. And thus again is the saying true, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."

Such is the power of the keys; a power the working of which you see every day; a power possessed by every clear-headed and warm-hearted Christian man; but, happily, a power the working of which is not dependent upon those who possess it. It is the dark side of all Christian effort, the saddening ingredient in a work otherwise all joyous. We have to proclaim a loving Saviour, a free salvation, a God delighting in mercy, a heaven large enough to hold the world; we have to invite all men to that eternal home. And while we thus preach Christ we may but harden some in sin, lock the gate the faster, and confirm them in their unbelief. It is the inseparable attendant upon all the good that is ever done on earth. The duty is plain, the pleasure great, but the shadow will fall. In the very effort to loose we may bind the faster.

v.—*The responsibility which such a possession involves.*

"They watch for souls as those that give account." This, no doubt, describes what ought to be, rather than what is. But it expresses our accountability without reserve. One talent or five, the Master will come to see what we have gained. And we have no wish to evade this responsibility.

As pastors we are responsible. Not, indeed, for

your salvation; for our word may be a savour of death unto death, although we have been earnest and faithful. But responsible for the earnestness with which we work out our own salvation, that we may the more clearly hold forth the word of life. Responsible for the assiduity with which we bring every thought into subjection to the Gospel of Christ, and keep under our body and bring it into subjection. Responsible for the diligence with which we study the Gospel of Christ, lest we should in our message give an uncertain or erroneous sound. Responsible for the fearlessness with which we speak the truth, not ashamed to declare the whole counsel of God. Responsible for the zeal and love and earnestness with which we intreat and exhort all, if by any means we might save some. There our responsibility ends, and your responsibility, as hearers, begins.

And every believer is responsible to the same Lord. If you know the truth, and can point to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, you can unlock the door of the kingdom as well as we. Parents thus open to their children, teachers to their scholars, and lead them in. And Christ expects it at your hands. To the limit of your power and the full extent of your opportunity, He would have you open the door. Your responsibility may vary in form and even in amount, but it does not vary in reality. You are responsible for the faithfulness with which you set forth Christ in your business, your homes, your daily

lives. Responsible for the prayerfulness with which you seek to have your characters formed by the Spirit of Christ and your principles based on His Word. Responsible for the care with which you study His Word, that you, too, as opportunity offers, may be able to explain the way of salvation, and say, "Behold the way to God."

We have these keys, if we have but light, and faith, and love. Let us take heed that they do not rust for want of use. Let us beware that they do not become bent and injured by error or by sin. Let us use them wisely, that we may be able at last to give a good account of our stewardship and have no reason to be ashamed in the day of the Lord. It is a glory to possess these keys. And it will be to all eternity a source of joy and praise to have used wisely and not without effect these wonderful keys of the kingdom.

But there are still some of you who have not entered when the door has been opened, and who still need, apparently, that the door should be opened again. Yet all that could be done has been done already to bring you into the kingdom. All that God could do He has done, in the gift of His Son, the invitation of His word, the influence of His Spirit, to throw open the door and lead you in. Christ is ever saying, "Come unto Me." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come, and let him that heareth say, Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life

freely." All that the early training of home influence, example, instruction, persuasion could do, has been done for many of you. There are few, if any, who have not known the way of life, and might not ere this have entered in. Why are you still standing without? It rests, must rest, with you. We have the key; but it depends on you whether the door is opened by the efforts we make, the truth we preach, the persuasion we use, or whether they only bind the door the faster. If you are paying no heed to all you hear, resisting all the light you have, rejecting all the offers made; if, in spite of all that has been done for your salvation, you are still living without repentance, without faith, unconverted and unchanged, you are only binding the door. The longer you continue thus the more firmly will it be bound, not from unwillingness in God or inability in Christ to save; not because the offers of mercy will be less freely made, or the welcome less hearty if you return; but because your increasing carelessness, your absorption in other things, your growing ungodliness and worldliness of heart render it every year far harder to enter, and more improbable that you ever will.

And do you really mean to stand outside for ever? Outside the fold of Christ in life; outside the home of Christ in heaven? The one must be followed by the other. To those who love darkness rather than light while here, there is nothing but outer darkness there. Only they who love light, and welcome the

light, and come to the light on earth, will ever dwell in our Father's home above, where God and the Lamb are the light thereof. Will you not enter? All now depends on you. We have the key, but we cannot force you in. We have the key, the only key that will ever open the door. We can preach to you salvation through Christ. We can point you to the Lamb of God. We can urge you to repentance, assure you of salvation if you but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and tell you of the crown of righteousness laid up for you in heaven. And no man can do more than this. No one possesses another key. Baptism will never make you a child of God or heir of heaven if you have not faith. Absolution could never take away sin if you do not repent of it, and then only can the blood of Christ really cleanse you from it. No sacraments can open heaven, and no refusal of them keep it closed. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Go now to Christ, and you will find an open door. Go at once, lest by your continued delay the door become more firmly bound and the key that ought to open lock it all the faster. Go while the light is shining and the truth clear and your heart susceptible, lest by your impenitence you spring the lock, so that no one shall be able to open the door. We preach for eternity, and for eternity you hear; for whatsoever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven.

CAIN AND ABEL; OR, THE FIRST SACRIFICE.

"And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect."—GEN. iv. 4, 5.

SACRIFICE is one of the oldest and most widely-spread of all the religious institutions in the world. All races of men, from the lowest to the loftiest, have practised it, though in many different forms. There has been no uniformity in the mode or the material, but there has been hardly any variation in the fact. The depth of man's fall and the corruption of his nature have been displayed, on the one hand in some of its most revolting and degrading horrors, and on the other hand the wonders of God's redeeming grace have been manifested in the one perfect sacrifice which Christ offered up on Calvary in the sacrifice of Himself. It received the direct stamp of Divine approval in the acceptance of the first sacrifice that was ever offered; and for more than a thousand years the people of Israel presented sacrifices in obedience to a Divine command. And if now for two thousand years the offering of such sacri-

fice has ceased, it is not because God does not require it, or man can be accepted without it, but because God has been satisfied by the one offering of His own Son, and Christ by that one offering for ever perfected them that are sanctified.

When was this custom first introduced? We naturally look to the Bible for an answer to this question, and in the Bible to the book before us. This book professes to give us the *genesis* of all things. It does give us the genesis of most things. It gives us, for example, not only the genesis of the heavens and the earth, but that of land and sea, plants and animals, whales and creeping things, man and woman, agriculture and grazing, tents and cities, organs and harps, hammers and swords, clothing and labour, of sin, of sorrow, and of death. And it would be marvellous indeed if there should be no record whatever of the genesis of sacrifice, and no account of either the time or mode in which the first sacrifice was offered to God. The common supposition that we have no such record arises simply from an unwillingness to read the Scriptures as they are written, and the assumption that men *must* have been taught to offer sacrifice long before the event recorded here. But there is really no ground for any such assumption, and it seems to me the simplest course to look upon this, the first sacrifice on record, as really the first ever presented, and so learn from this the way in which God gave to man his earliest lessons in the great law of sacrifice.

Let us, then, look first at,—

I.—*The two sacrifices that are here mentioned.*

It is difficult to picture to ourselves the exact circumstances. Paradise must by this time have disappeared. There was no one now to dress and keep it; and its beauty would be destroyed by the luxuriant growth of briars, thorns, and weeds. The tree of life may still have been standing, surrounded by its wall of fire; or, perhaps it may already have been transplanted to the celestial paradise, where it was afterwards seen by the Apostle John. The cherubim may therefore have ended their task of keeping the way of the tree of life *for* man as well as *from* him. The two sons of Adam had grown up to men's estate, and each had chosen his settled avocation,—the founders of the two long lines of farmers and graziers, tillers of the ground and keepers of sheep, those indispensable branches of industry that have been the chief support of civilised life down to the present day. Their toil had yielded a rich reward. Abel's sheep had multiplied into a numerous flock, and the corn-fields of Cain had gladdened his heart with an abundant harvest.

They both of them recognised God as the Giver of all: for as yet the imagination of man's heart, however evil, had invented no idol before which to bow. And they thought it right to acknowledge His bounty by presenting some portion of the gifts to Him. Whether they did this in concert we do not know. They may

have gone together; but in all probability they went at separate times. Abel took some of the choicest of his flock, and Cain either a sheaf of corn from his stack, or one of the earliest sheaves that had been reaped from the waving crops of golden corn that were still standing in his field.

They both of them took their gifts to the Lord. To what spot they took them is unimportant, and therefore is not recorded here. Some suppose that Adam officiated as priest, and they took them to him; but the priesthood of Adam is a fiction, for which there is no foundation. Some imagine that they placed them before the cherubim as the visible representatives of God. But they were not stationed there as His representatives; and this would have been an approach to idolatry, which would surely have met with no approval from Him. Some think they erected altars on their own land; and others that they laid them on the ground, simply waiting to see what the Lord would do. All these questions are unimportant, however interesting the solution might be. If it were desirable that we should know we should not have been left in the dark. It is enough for us to know that this is the first recorded instance in all the world's history of the bringing of an offering to the Lord. Man has been a recipient all these years, living upon the bounty of the Lord; and he now wakes up to the feeling that he ought to give as well as receive. He takes an offering from his own store, and gives

back what God has given to him. Each takes the first-fruits, the one of his field, the other of his flock; and they both offer them to the Lord.

II.—*The striking difference in the reception they meet with.*

"The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect." This simple statement throws no light whatever upon the manner in which the acceptance and rejection were made apparent. Ingenuity enough has been expended upon the subject, but has failed to explain what may have been designedly concealed. The common opinion is that a fire from heaven fell upon Abel's offering, and Cain's was left unheeded. Others, that there flashed forth a visible glory, the sign of Divine approval; while in some different mode the displeasure of the Deity was made known to Cain. And others, again, conclude that, as the Lord himself spake afterwards to Cain, there is every reason to suppose that by some audible word or voice within He announced to the one that his offering was accepted, and to the other that his was refused.

But it matters very little in what way the difference was revealed. It was at once intelligible to them both. Whatever had been the origin of the first desire to bring an offering to the Lord, and whatever the reason for the selection that each of them made, there was something in the offering brought by Abel

which so fully met the duty of man and the demand of God, that at once the Divine approval was made known, and, with a heart glowing with gladness and gratitude, Abel went back to his home. And whatever prompted Cain to offer,—whether it was simply in imitation of Abel, or from a right sense of gratitude and duty,—there was something so defective in the sacrifice, something so essential that had been omitted, that as he brought it God could not accept it, and the sign of rejection was equally plain. God, doubtless, meant him to find out a more excellent way. But he became wroth, his countenance fell, and with a heart full of disappointment and rage Cain returned to his home.

We are not surprised at the acceptance of the sacrifice which Abel had presented. Though, when we consider all the facts, there is infinitely more to astonish us in the love that accepted the gifts which even Abel brought than in the fact that no notice was taken of the offering made by Cain.

But can we discover the reason for the difference? Is there any answer to be found to the question, Why was no notice taken of Cain, and the sacrifice he offered refused?

I need not tell you how many answers have been given; so many that it may seem very presumptuous to attempt to add another. Yet there is something so important, so significant, and, to my mind, so instructive in the whole affair that I think it right to try, even if I fail.

Some find it altogether in *the nature of Cain's sacrifice.* But there was nothing wrong in this. Not only was it a natural thing that each should bring a portion of what he had received, but when God directed Moses to lay down the laws of sacrifice for the Jews He expressly commanded that they should bring the first-fruits of the ground, and the offering of the wave-sheaf was one of the most important acts which the Israelites performed. That cannot, therefore, have been wrong in Cain which God Himself enjoined.

Others find the explanation in *the motive.* But as nothing is said about the motive, and as it is always difficult to fathom the motives which prompt any man to action, we must not seek it here. Moreover, as far as it goes, there is no evidence of anything wrong. If the offering he brought was simply an admission of dependence, an expression of gratitude, a recognition not only of the existence of God, but of the fact that He ought to be worshipped,—yes, and a declaration of his own desire to join in that worship now; can you say that in all this, however faulty, there was really anything wrong?

A more common opinion is that *the difference in their character* was the reason for the different treatment they received. But God, whose throne of grace is expressly raised for sinners to approach and live, and who would gladly save the chief of sinners, would not have begun His work of salvation by rejecting one who was trying to draw near, however great his sin.

I know that it is almost always assumed that God had already taught man how to sacrifice, had told him what sacrifices to bring, had enjoined upon him the offering of a bleeding lamb, and that Cain was daringly breaking a Divine command, and mocking the Almighty to His face. But there is not the slightest evidence of this, and the only fact that has been adduced in its support is the trivial circumstance that when God put our parents out of the garden of Eden He made them coats of skins.

Surely if Cain had sinned like this, instead of receiving such gentle treatment at the hand of God, there would have come out a fire from the Lord and consumed him, as in the days of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Where are we, then, to look for the explanation?

1. In the omission made by Cain.
2. In the purpose of God.

1. The omission made by Cain.

The key to the whole is supplied in part in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more complete sacrifice than Cain." What made it more complete? Just look at the difference. Cain offered his first-fruits, and this was right. Abel offered a life, took a lamb, slew it, and shed its blood. Cain and Abel were both sinners, and from sinful men even gifts and service cannot be accepted till the sin is expiated and the sinner pardoned. But "with-

out shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." This is the only way. We know not how much Abel himself understood. But his was sacrifice of the true kind. The shedding of blood, the offering of a life, was the true and only way of approach. Such an offering was, and was to be, the perpetual symbol of deep consciousness of sin, of hope in God's mercy, of faith in God's promises. In that sacrifice God doubtless saw far more than Abel; to Him it was the type of Calvary, the speechless witness to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and in view of the Antitype He had respect to the type, and accepted the offering at Abel's hands. And here was the contrast between the two. The offering of Cain was not wrong in itself, but wrong in what was omitted.

The Israelites were ordered to offer the same; but not till they had offered a sacrifice for sin. It might have been the right offering for perfect men. It was the right offering for men forgiven. Even Abel, had he lived, might have been taught that God wants other offerings beside a sacrifice for sin; or, rather, the very offering he brought did mean much more than this, for one lamb would have sufficed for this, and he brought several, and took care to bring "fat ones," too. And had Cain first of all presented his sacrifice for sin, God would gladly have welcomed the gift of his corn. But he was neither faultless nor forgiven. And when he came with no confession, no

sign of contrition, no symbol of penitence, no atoning sacrifice, and no feeling that it was needed, the gift he brought could not be accepted at his hand.

A second reason I find is,—

2. The purpose of God.

It is too commonly supposed that the want of respect to the offering of Cain was tantamount to the rejection of Cain himself. And it might be said that, if Cain knew no better, it was hardly in harmony with the loving-kindness of God to shut him so suddenly out of His mercy. But he was not rejected. God told him, indeed, that he could be accepted; and it was his own pride that shut him out of the favour of God.

This was, in fact, *man's first lesson in sacrifice.* They were both trying their hands at something entirely new. The impulse was right, and, like every right impulse, came from God. But God did not lay down the law. He let each try in his own way, and waited till afterward to show them which is best. Abel chose the right way, and God showed that it is right. Cain's first attempt was not so good, and God took no notice. This was not to discourage, but to let him see that Abel had found the true way to draw near. Had he learned the lesson of "doing well," he would have been accepted too. God meant it for good, yea, for his salvation. It was his fatal jealousy that ruined all.

And had God acted otherwise, what must have been the consequence? He came as though he had no sin; drew near to God as if there were no barrier between; and brought his gift as if his hands were clean, and neither atonement nor pardon were needed by him. Had his offering been accepted then, there would have been nothing to make him see the great chasm that sin had opened between man and God. The self-righteousness with which he came would have struck still deeper root into his soul, and, elated with satisfaction and pride, he would have gone back to his home, like the Pharisee from the Temple, with nothing to bring him to a sense of sin or to lead him to smite his breast and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This, then, was God's second word of mercy to fallen man; and the whole Gospel was enfolded in this His first great lesson in sacrifice.

III.—*The lessons which we may learn from this account.*

1. God's desire for our offerings.
2. The proper order of our offerings.
3. The true foundation of all acceptable offerings.

1. God's desire for our offerings.

We should make a great mistake if we thought for a moment that God despised or rejected the offerings of men. This was Cain's inference: "He does not care for me, and does not want my gifts." He

could not have made a greater mistake. God did care for him, and would he but have come as a sinner, seeking pardon and redemption, He would have welcomed all the gifts that he could bring. And in this He has not changed. God wants our gifts, the choicest we can bring ; our offerings, the best we can present ; our service, the most perfect we can render. He asks them from us; it is the least that we can do, and He gladly welcomes all we bring.

2. The proper order of our offerings.

The great error was in coming as though there were nothing wrong. The sinner must not come as if he were a righteous man. Let the offering he brings be even his best, let his worship be as faultless as human nature will allow, let his service be the noblest he can possibly perform, and his gifts as costly as his wealth can purchase ; he must not present them as though he had not sinned and on the strength of his offerings alone could come to God. The best of men is still a sinner, and as a sinner must he draw near.

It must be ever on the basis of an offering for sin that we present our offerings of service and praise. It must be on the foundation of an atoning sacrifice that we lay on the altar our contributions and our gifts. In a word, no service can ever be acceptable, and to no gifts will He have respect, unless we bring them as sinners, confessing our guilt and resting upon a sacrifice offered for sin.

3. The true foundation of all acceptable offerings.

The lamb that Abel slew could be no true foundation; but in that lamb God at least saw clearly the great sacrifice of Calvary, and in the light of that He had respect to Abel and his offering. That sacrifice has now been offered; and faith in Christ—true, penitent, all-trusting faith—makes that sacrifice our own. And only through that one great sacrifice can our offerings attract Divine attention, or we ourselves find the true way to God. Sinners we all are, and as sinners we must come. Let us forget this fact, and, putting the cross aside, go up with our prayers, our gifts, our service, as though there were nothing amiss, and God will take no more notice of us than He did of Cain. There will be no acceptance, no response. But let us come with deep consciousness of sin; let us go first to the cross of Christ for the only plea that we can use; let us come through Christ, relying on His sacrifice, believing only in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world: God will soon take notice then; the humblest offering will be pleasing, and the most unworthy sinner welcome.

This witness comes from that far-off time, and that first sacrifice outside the gate of Paradise. A still higher witness comes from One who, when by His death He had purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and is within the gate of Paradise now. Abel is dead, and he being dead yet speaketh; but there is One who both liveth and was

dead, and whose blood speaketh better things than that of Abel. Through Him alone can any find acceptance; through Him the chief of sinners may find salvation, and the most distant be brought nigh.

"Paschal Lamb, by God appointed,
All our sins on Thee were laid;
By Almighty love anointed
Thou hast full atonement made.

"All Thy people are forgiven
Through the virtue of Thy blood;
Opened is the gate of heaven,
Man is reconciled to God."

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC;

OR, MAN'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

"*In the mount of the Lord it will be seen.*"—GEN. xxii. 14.

THERE are two other ways of rendering this proverb, viz. "In the mount of the Lord He will appear;" or, what I think better still, "In the mount the Lord will appear."

There are few scenes in Old Testament history more familiar than the one out of which this proverb grew. From our earliest days we have drawn our own picture of the patriarch Abraham climbing the mount with his youthful son by his side. And in all the life of Abraham there is no incident which more thoroughly brings out his character, or shows more strikingly his unswerving faith and his unflinching obedience to the will of God. It must have been with a bewildered mind, though it was with a firm and steady step, that he walked for three days toward the land of Moriah, to the mount which God had promised to show him. And it must have been with mingled anguish and faith that he uttered the prophecy, "The Lord will provide Himself a Lamb."

We cannot help admiring the patriarch, notwithstanding the fact that the purpose for which he was leaving his home was, under a stern sense of duty, to slay his son.

But do we really feel the same admiration for God when we think of this command? And whatever our faith in His rectitude, are our minds quite at ease when we think of Him as giving to the patriarch, who was so ready to obey, the command to slay and burn his son? He had brought Abraham away from his own country, where such scenes were too common, that he might *not* have his mind polluted by the least contact with them. How, then, could He thus command His servant to perform the very worst of the acts from which He wished to keep him free? He condemns more than once in the most indignant terms the sin of those who caused their sons to pass through the fire. How, then, could He command His servant to perform the very rite which He so intensely abhorred?

It is true that God does not permit him to perform the act itself, but stays his hand just as he is about to kill his son. Yet this does not remove the difficulty, or alter the fact that God had really given the command. The command to do the deed would be in itself a sanction of the deed. If in itself it was absolutely wrong, God could not command it; if, therefore, He did command it, the very command would prove it right, and it would not have been at

variance with His character to allow the deed itself to be performed.

You must, I think, have felt some such difficulties as these, even though you may have dismissed them from your minds. Others have felt them also. The infidel has not been slow to notice the discrepancy, and to use it as a two-edged sword, cutting alike at the credibility of the history and the morality of the religion. Believing critics have also tried hard to remove the stumbling-block out of the way. One supposes it to be the interpretation of a hieroglyphic; another thinks that the whole was a vision, like the scenes described in Ezekiel; and a third believes that the temptation came from Satan, though it is expressly attributed to God.

But such solutions as these will never satisfy, or set the question at rest. No explanation will ever meet the case which does not allow that the event actually occurred as here described, and the command really came from God. To explain away is not to explain. Is there any other way of meeting the difficulty? Can we with the light we possess interpret the command, and discern its harmony with the character of God? If we cannot, we will bow with submission, longing for light, and believing that such an interpretation is possible, though now beyond our reach. But I do not think it is so difficult as some suppose. The author of this proverb had, I believe, really found the key; and with this proverb before us, we may not

only find our way to solve the difficulty, but bring out, in all its clearness, the meaning and intention of this great trial of Abraham's faith.

Let us look, then, first at—

I.—*The fact which gave rise to the proverb.*

In the full and graphic account which the chapter contains there are three points which stand out with peculiar prominence: namely, the command given to Abraham; the promptness with which he prepared to obey the command; and the interpretation which God gave to His own command.

1. What was the command which God gave to Abraham?

"Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a *burnt-offering* upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." When we read these words as they stand here, they seem to admit of but one interpretation, namely, that Abraham was distinctly commanded by God to *slay* and *burn* his son.

The very deed, with all its painful cruelties and attendant horrors, which distinguished the worship of Moloch, is here apparently commanded by God. But the question arises whether, after all, this was really the case? Everything turns upon the precise word employed by God in giving the command to Abraham. Now, although the expression '*burnt*-offering is

used in our version, the first thing which strikes us is that in the original command there is really no allusion to *burning* at all. And although the idea of a burnt-offering invariably suggests the thought of slaying, yet in the command which was actually given there is not the slightest reference to slaying either. The word used is, no doubt, the same word as that which was afterwards applied to the sacrifices which were burned upon the altar. But the word itself means nothing more than that which is either *sent up* or *taken up*.[1] There are two different ways of accounting for the use of this word as the standing name for the burnt-offering. Some supposed that it was so called because it was *lifted up* when placed upon the altar; others because it was *sent up* to God in the fire. With this we need not concern ourselves. It is enough that the words themselves mean nothing more than "give him up," or offer him up as an ascending offering," *i.e.* an offering the whole of which went up or was given up to God, and not a part alone. This, then, was all that God commanded. It was an obscure command no doubt; but it was not a command to slay or burn. It wanted interpreting; but in its strictest sense it was simply a command *to give Isaac*

[1] The literal rendering of the words would be, "cause him to ascend for an ascending;" or, "offer him up as an offering;" and if the same expression was applied to a *burnt*-offering, it was not because the offering was burned, but because it was sent up to God, and burning was the only way in which a bullock or a lamb could be entirely given up to God.

entirely up to God. It wanted interpreting; and no interpretation was given. For the time Abraham was left in ignorance as to the real meaning of the command. God did command him to give up, yea, offer up, his son; but how and when He did not at first explain.

But if God never meant, and never commanded, that Isaac should be slain, why did He allow him to suffer for two long days the anguish that must have been occasioned by the mistaken belief that He did? Two explanations may be given. The preparation which Abraham made showed clearly enough that the old associations had not lost their power. Yet it was of the utmost importance that the idea should be thoroughly and for ever eradicated, that human sacrifice could be acceptable to God. That is what God is doing here. He allows him at first to proceed in his own mistaken way, and then steps in, arrests his hand, and shows him the sacrifice He really requires. It was Abraham's first lesson in acceptable sacrifice; a lesson he was never likely to forget when once it had been learned. The natural tendency of the human heart is to believe that God delights in victims slain. But Abraham was to learn once for all that it is *living sacrifices, and not dead ones,* that God really desires.

Moreover, he was also to learn that this son of his was not his own, but God's; that he was to hold him at God's disposal, train him up for God's service, and

be ready to do with him whatever God might direct or require. He might have been taught this, and have assented to it with all his heart. But amidst the strong temptations to carve out a nobler career for Isaac than that of a nomad chief, to make him the founder of a city, the leader of an army, or perhaps a king, he might soon have forgotten that Isaac belonged to God. But never would he forget the anguish of those two days, or the lesson he learned by that altar's side on which Isaac had been laid to die. But let us look now at—

2. The attempt of Abraham to obey the command.

There can be no question whatever that the interpretation which Abraham gave to the command was that he was to slay his son. Perhaps it was impossible for him to interpret it in any other way. If so the position in which he was placed was this: he had received a command which he did not fully understand. Part of it was clear; but the rest was obscure. There was, indeed, one interpretation possible. But that was one which was not only opposed to all that he knew of God, but at variance with all that God had done and promised. That son was to be his heir, the heir of all the promises. Yet the command seemed clear enough, "Go, and slay thy son."

What course did Abraham take? He might well have hesitated. He might have said, "That cannot

be the meaning, and I will not go." There was much to warrant his waiting, and putting off obedience for a time. Men often do so without a tithe of the excuse he would have had. But no; he does not, dare not, delay. He takes what light he has, and acts as he interprets the command. One part is plain, he will carry that out in full; and the rest he will prepare to obey in the only sense in which he can understand the words. And what sustained him in his preparation to obey this strange and perplexing command? His strong faith in God. He knew that he wanted to do right; and he did not believe that God would let him go wrong. "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." If you are really to be the lamb, God will show it more plainly. If I am wrong, and you are not the lamb, God will interpret His strange command. But if you are, and I am to slay you, and that body is to be burned, so great is the mystery and so sure His promise, that out of the fire thou wilt rise again; for God is able to raise thee from the dead, from whence I received thee in a figure (Heb. xi. 19).

With such thoughts as these the patriarch wended his weary way to perform an act which he believed to have been commanded of God. Did he do right? If his interpretation were not the correct one, was he to be commended for preparing so readily to do what God really had not enjoined? Surely he was. What else could he do? One part was plain, "Go to

Moriah." Thither he would go, prepared to do what he thought right, but ready for light, if God would give it him there. It was the heroism of perfect obedience, and the triumph of an unwavering faith. He must act, for God had commanded. He will act up to the light he has, yea, up to all the light he *thinks* he has, and trust to God to give him more. He will go to the mount; perhaps there the Lord will appear.

This brings us then, thirdly, to—

3. The explanation which God supplied.

He went to the mount. God allowed him to go there with the difficulty unsolved. In bewildering perplexity God suffered him to take every step of that long dreary road. The sun might be shining, but it was all clouds and darkness to him. There might be flowers about the road, but they had no beauty or fragrance for him. Like the three days of Saul's blindness, it was a time of fearful conflict. He thought he understood the God he adored. But this terrible command struck at the roots of all his reverence and faith and love. Many a time, no doubt, would he be ready to cry out as David, "Oh, Isaac, my son, my son, would God that I could die for thee!" And many, perhaps, were the temptations to turn back, and rather seek another god, than worship a God who could give such commands.

But if the conflict was fierce, the triumph was the

greater. He was taking the right path. He would take every step of the way. Perhaps the next would bring the light he wanted. The mount is reached, but no light has come. He climbs it with Isaac, but all is dark still. The summit is gained, but there is no angel, no vision, no voice! What is he now to do? Shall he lay his hand upon the lad, and find, perhaps, that he was after all mistaken? He sees no other way. With firm hand, with a bursting heart, and, we may be sure, with earnest prayer, he proceeds with the sacrifice. He lays the wood in order, and looks up: "O God, is *this* the way?" No answer comes. Another step is taken—Isaac is bound and laid upon the wood—and there is yet another prayer, "O God, *is* this the way?" But all is silent as the grave. One step alone remains. With trembling hand, but unhesitating heart, he grasps the knife, and lifts it up towards God. And there is yet one last, brief, earnest prayer, "Lord, ere I strike, is this *Thy* way?" The answer comes, "No; that is not My way. Thou hast believed, and thou hast obeyed. But thou didst not know all My will. There is a ram that thou mayst burn; but Isaac I want alive." He reached the mount, and in deep darkness climbed to its very top, but in the mount the Lord appeared.

We now proceed to—

II.—*The truth expressed in the proverb.*

"In the mount of the Lord it will be seen," or "in

the mount the Lord will appear." The meaning of the proverb is evident enough. Go right on as far as the path of duty is plain; climb to the very top of the mount, and if beyond that all is mist and uncertainty, you will not be left in darkness long, but in the mount the Lord will appear.

The proverb thus brings out—

1. The mode in which God often reveals our duty and His will.

As we look back on this strange incident in the life of Abraham, the whole is perfectly plain. The will and the design of God are clear enough. We see now that God never intended Isaac to be slain, or meant him to be sent up to Him in the flame. From the very first His meaning was what He explained it to be in the end. The faith of Abraham was tried, and his mind perplexed; but it was by his own inability to interpret, and not by any change in the command. Yet, with Abraham's light, all this had a very different aspect from that which it has with ours. The interpretation was intentionally withheld till he had shown, by his obedience to all that was clear, his readiness to trust in God for what was most obscure. And this was no exceptional case, but an illustration of a very general rule. In the commandments of God there is always an admixture of what is plain and what is obscure and perplexing. The present duty is clearly revealed, and the final consummation

may rise like a bright mountain peak, bathed in glorious sunlight; but the pathway is often buried in a dense dark cloud. The tent life of the patriarchs must often have seemed to them a strange preparation for the possession of the Promised Land. The Red Sea in front and the Egyptians behind formed a strange beginning to the deliverance of His people from captivity; and forty years in the desert must have sorely tried the faith of Moses. The visions of prophets were very bright, but the whole were sometimes swallowed up in the thick darkness that lay between. Yet God seldom explained the mystery till the time of fulfilment arrived. Till the very hour of Christ's appearance, they who were longing for the consolation of Israel were left with the glimmering light of Old Testament prophecy. Till the hour when Paul received his first commission, the heathen were left with their light which made darkness visible, and the Church knew not how to send the Gospel to them. Saul of Tarsus himself, in his thirst for right and his wish to do God's service, was allowed to go even to the length of persecuting the Church before the light of truth burst upon his mind. And very often in the course of his career we find him trying doors that are closed, making attempts that fail, getting dispirited when difficulties hem him in, and obliged to wait for the door to open, or the voice of God to bid him proceed.

And it is still the same. God does not make our

path all plain, or the truth all clear. He often lets us try our own solution before He steps in with His. With anxious hearts we try one door after another, only to find it closed; and then He comes and shows the open door. He lets us go to the very last extremity with our minds perplexed, and perhaps, like Abraham, troubled by our own mistaken thoughts; and only when we must either be enlightened or go wrong, His inward voice is heard, and all made plain. We go day after day, perhaps year after year, involved in deep anxiety through some false interpretation we have given to His word, just as the twelve disciples did through those three happy, yet deeply anxious, painful years of the Saviour's life on earth; and only when we come to the hour of deepest darkness, and are about to give up all for lost, do we get above the mist, and find the whole horizon clear. He often leads us to the very edge of the sea before He will tell us how we shall go through. He lets all our food be exhausted before He shows that there is manna in heaven. And He leaves us to faint with burning thirst, and only at the last moment lets us know that in the heated rock itself there are stored up cool refreshing streams. This is God's way: light as we need it, but darkness beyond. And it is a wise way; yea, and a most cheering way, to those who really believe that in the mount the Lord will appear.

The proverb also shows—

2. The perplexities in which we are sure to be sometimes involved.

God had not fully explained His meaning, and Abraham was mistaken in his interpretation. For two days he walked along looking for light, but looking in vain. It may appear strange to us that such a man should so misunderstand the character of God as to conceive it possible that *He* had wished for such a sacrifice. Yet he erred in common with some of the wisest men. Elijah went to Horeb with a mind full of mistakes as to the way in which God would work out His great designs. Habakkuk went up to his tower to watch, because he could not comprehend what God was about to do. Jonah sat down before Nineveh with the evident conviction that God could not mean to spare the city. John sent from his prison to Christ, hoping thereby to get rid of the troubles which were increasing in his mind. The "disciples followed and were afraid;" so utterly at variance did the way that Christ was taking appear with all the predictions of the Messiah's reign. And Peter's refusal to slay and eat was but a sign of the misgiving with which they threw open the Church to all the world.

And it has been thus with all the history of the Church to the present time. Sometimes it is in the study of Christian truth that these perplexities arise. Much is clear, as clear as the command to Abraham to go to Moriah, but there is also much obscure. There are parts of God's word which are still left in

darkness, or dim twilight at the best. We do our utmost to interpret them, but are never quite successful. The controversies that have arisen, the diversities of opinion that exist, and the divisions that have rent the Church, are but the standing proofs how eager has been the desire to arrive at all the truth, and how vain the attempt has been. Sometimes it is on questions of practice that we are thus perplexed. Some, like Abraham, proceed at once to the *literal* fulfilment of all commands; whilst others find in the *spirit* a more perfect obedience still. The very Word is often the ground of the difficulty with us, as it was with him. In the vain hope to carry out all even to the letter, the strangest practices have found their way into the Church. And often the most earnest and sincere are unable to determine what the will of the Lord really is. Then difficulties follow as to our daily lives. "The path of duty is the path of safety;" but the path of duty is sometimes hard to find. There are times when the passage seems blocked up in every direction. We have gone as God seemed to be leading us, and come to a sudden standstill. The difficulties thicken, the mist grows impenetrable, and we are at our wit's end. Yes, even the best are often beclouded thus. They have reached the mount, have climbed the very summit, but can see nothing when they are there. It is even darker than it was below. They can only hope that in the mount the Lord will appear.

And this is what the proverb affirms, for it tells us—

3. The certainty that light will come at last.

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." It was not till the very last moment that the light came, but it did come at last. The hand was uplifted to complete the sacrifice, and not till then was all the obscurity removed. So has it often been in the history of the people of God. It was not till Israel was reduced to the very last extremity in Egypt that Moses was sent to deliver them. And it was not till the deepest darkness had settled on the nation that the promised Messiah arrived. But He came; and He has always come to those who looked for His appearing. The waves ran high and the winds were wild in that dark night when the disciples were out upon the lake, and it was all the darker because Jesus was not with them; but as they toiled, and their hearts sank with fear, they strained their eyes, and soon saw Him coming upon the waves. So, when our troubles are thickest and our way darkest, of one thing we may be quite sure—that had we but eyes to pierce the mist we should soon see Him coming to comfort and to save. It is darkest before the dawn. When in our search for truth, or anxious desire for clear light to our eyes, or a firm foundation for our feet, we are brought almost to despair, that is the time He often chooses to come with all the light we need. We have got to the end of all we know; we

have reached the mount ; and in the mount the Lord appears. When, in the earnest wish to do His will, we have gone step by step where He was plainly leading, only to find that each step has brought us into deeper trouble, and troubles so deep that the waters have well-nigh gone over our head ; that was the time for His appearing, and He has brought us into a sure place. And when, like Abraham, with firmest faith, but most intense anxiety, we have climbed the mount up which He led us, not knowing what should befall us there, but with some dread suspicion that it would be to us a journey of sorrow and gloom, the darkness has gone, bright sunshine has bathed the mountain top in glory, and mourning has been turned into joy ; for in the mount the Lord has appeared.

As thus interpreted, we have here a lesson in obedience, and a lesson in faith.

A lesson in obedience.

Here is the patriarch with a revelation of the will of God, in the shape of a positive command. Of that command one part is plain enough ; the rest seems to admit of only one interpretation, but there is much to suggest a doubt whether that interpretation really be the correct one after all. What shall he do ? So far as the former is concerned his way is plain ; but how is the latter to be obeyed ? Shall he do nothing, because it seems at variance with all that he knows of God ; or shall he simply go to Moriah, and see what befalls

him there? He does far more than this. Strange as the command appears, and terrible as it is to him, he prepares at once to obey it, in what seems to him the only way in which it can be intended. He acts thoroughly up to the light he has, believing that if he need more God will be sure to give it in the end. He carries out to the utmost the convictions of his own mind, desiring to do all the will of God; and, mistaken though he is in part, God honours the desire expressed in the act, and in the mount the Lord appears.

Is not this a lesson for us? We often blame others for doing what we think to be wrong, though they are honestly carrying out the convictions of their own mind. Yet even if we are right, and they have failed to interpret aright the whole of the will of God, they are not alone in this. And whose convictions should they carry out if they do not carry out their own? Surely they are right in doing what seems to them to be the will of God, if only their minds are open to receive further light whenever it may come.

And we ourselves may be doing just the same. If Abraham, and Moses, and the apostles themselves did sometimes misinterpret the will and the ways of the Lord, how much more may we in some things be still feeling our way in darkness, or with only a light obscure? But if it be so, our duty is very plain. So far as we have light, let us act up to the light. So far as we have convictions of right, let us carry them out.

with firmness and fidelity. Act thoroughly out your convictions of duty. Go with firm step in the way that seems right. We are sure to make some mistakes. But better a mistake with an upright purpose than life with no purpose at all. Better come short of the mark, or even miss it a little, than never make any attempt to reach it. The man who saw men as trees walking was better off than those who were totally blind. Never hesitate on the ground that, after all, you may possibly be wrong. Do all that seems to you right, only seeking for guidance and praying for light. God will not let you go very far wrong, and in the mount the Lord will appear.

But we sometimes meet with those who say they are *waiting for light.* Waiting for light? You may wait a long while, and perhaps never get it after all. Light never comes by waiting. The sun itself does not come to us; but the earth revolves, and we go to the sun. Had Abraham waited in his tent, he would in all probability never have got the light which he got on the mount. The way to get light is to go for it. Abraham went as far as he could; and when he could go no further God appeared. Let us do the same. "Whereto we have attained, let us walk by that rule." Live up to your light. Go to the utmost limit of what you know or believe; climb to the very summit of the mount, and in the mount the Lord will appear.

And thus we have, lastly—

A lesson in faith.

There was something strange and inexplicable about the ways of God, yet the patriarch never lost his confidence in God himself. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." To all appearance God was about to take from him the very son whom He had given as the heir of all the promises. It looked for the moment as if He were violating His own assurance, and about to render its fulfilment impossible. Yet even this did not shake his faith, so certain did he feel that it must be all right in the end. This was the faith which God honoured in the patriarch, and this is the faith which He still desires. It is easy to trust when all is fair, and believe when we can really see. It is no proof of strong faith to be of good courage when all is prosperous, and follow without misgiving when the way is pleasant and smooth. But to follow when all things seem against us, and trust Him notwithstanding; to hold fast our confidence when all seems going wrong; to go deeper and deeper into trouble, and yet keep our faith firm; to suffer the loss of all things, and say with unshaken trust, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord;" to see no quarter from which light can come, and yet go on with the calm assurance that it will come at last; to go into the deepest darkness, yea, into the valley of the shadow of death itself, fearing no evil—this is the faith He wants to see, and this is the faith He is sure to honour.

And though He calls us to toil with anxious hearts up the steep mountain's side, with no prospect but that of sorrow and anguish even there, let us but go to the very summit, holding on our way through bog and briar, scaling the heaps of rugged rock that lie piled upon the mountain side, climbing with hands and feet the pathless precipice, ever onward, ever upward, to the highest point to which He calls ; and if, exhausted and breathless with fatigue and fear, we reach the mountain top, we shall not lose our reward, for in the mount the Lord will appear.

ESAU AND JACOB;

OR, GOD'S LAW OF SELECTION.

"Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir: Esau is Edom." "And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan."—GEN. xxxvi. 8; xxxvii. 1.

THE patriarch Abraham entered Canaan with the assurance that his seed should become possessors of the land, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. This was the birthright to be bequeathed to his descendants. The birth of Isaac was followed by his solemn dedication to God, but this did not put an end to the anxieties of his father Abraham. He had still a double duty to perform, to keep him from forming an alliance with the idolatrous Canaanites, and yet so to train him that he would be under no temptation to leave the land. This was a task of no little difficulty. If he kept him in Canaan, he would be sure ere long to marry a Canaanite, as his cousins in Haran were not likely to come and visit the camp in Beersheba of their own accord. And if he went to Haran to visit his cousins, there was no little danger that he might never return. He therefore determined to send his faithful steward

with the responsible commission to invite one of his nieces to return with the prospect of being Isaac's bride. It was no light responsibility, but Eliezer, whose faith in God was as strong as that of Abraham, simply cast his burden upon the Lord, and set out without misgiving. He took with him presents enough and ornaments enough to captivate the fancy and win the heart of any Eastern maiden, and wealth to form an adequate dowry for an Oriental princess. In all the rest, with the most implicit confidence, he left his cause with God. His prudence and confidence were rewarded. Rebekah was sent back with the Oriental benediction—"Mother of thousands of millions be thou, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them"—a blessing which has been most literally fulfilled, not only in the conquest of Canaan and the victories of David, but in the greater victories of Christ; and not only in the lineal descendants, four millions of whom are living now, and thousands of millions of whom have passed across the stage of earth, but in the thousands of millions who through faith in Jesus Christ have become the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Isaac himself was a very different man from his father. He had none of the daring, the strength, the originality of character by which Abraham was distinguished. Meditation was his *forte*, not action. He liked the quiet of the tent, the pleasures of domestic life, the delicacies of the table, and would have been

quite unfit to head such an enterprise as that on which his father entered when he left the land of Haran, or when he gathered his retainers to rescue Lot from the army of the kings of the East. All that he could do was to tread in his father's steps, and this he did most rigidly. He fell into his father's dangers and repeated his father's mistakes. He also kept to his father's God, and faithfully respected his father's call. He dug the wells his father had digged, rather than sink fresh ones of his own. He gave them the names his father had given them. And when Rebekah appeared, instead of preparing a new tent for his bride, he took her to the tent that his mother had occupied.

There is nothing original about him, and at first it might appear as though the race was degenerating. There is nothing new or striking about his life. And just because there is so little enterprise, the importance of his life and of the place he occupied is too often overlooked. Originality is a good thing, but every one cannot be original. And it would not do for every one to possess originality. Enterprise and originality are both good things; but the absence of both is also good, and sometimes better. The pioneer who cuts your roads and opens up new ways is worthy of all admiration. But the men who follow and level the roads, and tread them hard, and pave them smooth, are quite as needful, and their work is worthy of honour too. The world and the Church may go too fast. Vaulting ambition may overleap

itself and fall on the other side. Every enterprise, however good, needs time for consolidation. And this is provided for in both State and Church when the daring men who breast the waves, or push forward into regions beyond, are followed by men like-minded yet diverse, strong to maintain the line already reached, and content to tread and tread again the path trodden before. Alternation is a law as well as an occasional fact. That Isaac was not like his father would have been bad indeed if he had wanted his father's principles and forsaken his father's ways. But as he kept true to both, it was the highest honour that the most striking fact that could be recorded of him was that he digged again the wells which his father had digged, and called their names after the names by which his father had called them. These wells were memorials of the patient pilgrimage to which Abraham, the great nomad chief, had submitted, rather than put forth his power to seize upon the land in opposition to the word of God. The persistency with which those wells were stopped was but one sign of the resolute determination of those already in the land to prevent their gaining a footing there; and the religious care with which they were opened again was the proof of Isaac's willingness to live as Abraham lived, and of his unwavering faith in the promises of God.

The next generation showed a marked and marvellous change. Two sons were born—twin sons—

but, instead of the ordinary resemblance seen in twins, they presented in all respects the most striking contrast. They seemed to have inherited the two halves of their parents' character and temperament, not in combination, but in irreconcilable division. All the contrasts which are so often seen bound up, if not blended in the same life, appear here in two lives; and whatever may have been their resemblance to their parents, they had none whatever to one another. In ordinary families children are a bond of union; here they introduce division and strife. Neither Isaac nor Rebekah knew how to soften the disparities. They added to the discord by choosing their favourites. The quietness of Isaac clung to the more robust and vigorous Esau, who went out to hunt and brought him game, and all the energy of Rebekah's mind was concentrated on her one determined scheme to promote the supremacy of Jacob, her favourite son.

At the birth of Esau and Jacob, Rebekah received from God a clear prediction that they would not unite to form one tribe or nation as the sons of Jacob did, but that their descendants would separate from one another, or form two distinct nations, and that the descendants of the elder would be subordinate to those of the younger. The obvious meaning of this prophecy was that the promises of God to Abraham, embracing not only the possession of Canaan, but the innumerable seed, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, would be transmitted in

Jacob's line. A singular use has been made of this prophecy. Malachi, when appealing to the many proofs which the Jews had received of the favour of God and the fulfilment of His promises, uses the words, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste." And St. Paul quotes both the prophecy given to Rebekah and the words of Malachi, as evidence that the purposes of God are not bound up with individual men or particular lives; that His purposes will be fulfilled; that to accomplish them He chooses fitting agents, whether Jew or Gentile, elder or younger; that primogeniture or race are nothing to Him; and as He sets Esau aside and selects Jacob to be the leader in the ancient patriarchal Church, so will He set the Jew aside and choose the Gentile to take the lead, if the Jew, by despising his birthright, should prove as unfit for His purpose as Esau had done. But these words are often quoted as proving that God singles out from tribes or families the individuals who must be saved, and rejects others who for that reason cannot be saved. No application could be more erroneous. There is not a word about salvation, much less about individual salvation. The first prophecy does not refer to the individuals themselves, but to their descendants; and while Malachi appeals to the fact that the prediction had been accomplished, St. Paul points to it as an illustration of the great law of selection which characterises, without exception, all the deal-

ings of God. What is that law? That God has before Him one great purpose, the purpose of mercy, of complete salvation, the blessing of all the nations of the earth in the Great Son of Abraham and God. That to effect this end He is constantly engaged in selecting those who, through their faith, their self-consecration, or their willingness to follow Him, are fitting instruments in His hand to carry on this glorious work, and that He does as constantly set aside those who are unfit for this high calling, whatever their faith or their privileges have been. It was by this great law of selection that He preserved Noah and swept the rest away. By this He called Abraham to leave his country and his home; and the same law is perpetuated in the Church as well as in the world. By this He set aside the whole race of adults who came out of Egypt, and chose the younger in their stead. By this He sifted the people in Canaan, choosing the remnant to carry on His work. By this He cut off ten tribes, that the tribe of Judah might feel her responsibility to do His will. By this He cast off the whole nation with the exception of the believing Jews, that they, with the Gentiles, might form a Church of believing men, true children of believing Abraham. By this law He has set aside the most prosperous and privileged Churches and nations, when they have become engrossed in their earthly grandeur, and failed to walk worthy of their calling of God. His law is not obsolete even now. By this He is working still,

selecting nations, Churches, individuals, not for their own salvation, but to accomplish His purpose of mercy and love. If by His law He selected the nations of Europe before or above all the other nations of the earth, it was not that He desired their salvation alone, but that they were the most fitting agents to bless or evangelise the rest. And if of these He has conferred the greatest honour on the Anglo-Saxon race, it is not that He is a respecter of persons, but that He has seen in them the readiest response to His call to go and preach the Gospel to every nation. By this call we stand. This is our birthright. And if ever, engrossed in worldly greatness and material wealth and power, we should like Esau despise our birthright, as surely as Esau was set aside will some younger Jacob be exalted to our place, and the elder will serve the younger once more.

I.—*On what ground can the selection be explained?*

If we enter the camp where Esau and Jacob spent their early days, we should see all the signs of a Bedouin encampment. In the centre are two large tents, the tents of the chief and his wife. About thirty feet off are two other tents, the homes of their two sons. All around, stretching far away, are scores of smaller tents, occupied by hundreds of men and women, some of whom are engaged in tending the flocks, watering the herds, milking the cows and goats, or lying on the grass as the sheep are feeding

around. Two young men in the prime of life come out of their respective camps. The one is commanding in his look, walks with a firm step, bronzed apparently by the sun, though in reality it is his natural complexion. He has an open countenance, which wins your confidence. You could go at once and shake him by the hand. The other is delicately made, his face is more finely moulded. There is no sign of power either in his manner or his make. He walks slowly, looks about cautiously. He does not look you in the face as the other does. He is evidently timid, mistrustful, yet his eye and lip show that he is keen and calculating. He may look at you, but he seems to be looking through you or beyond you. The instinctive feeling is, "I should not like this man." And even Samuel would probably have been carried away by first appearances, and have said, "The former is the one that I should choose."

And first impressions are not weakened by further acquaintance. The more you know of the men the deeper they become. Yes, it is here Jacob is not prepossessing. All our sympathies go towards Esau. Jacob's dark side stands prominently out. He is unamiable and selfish; deep and crafty; untruthful and unscrupulous; wanting in frankness, and full of suspicious reserve; without manliness or courage; deceitful to his brother, his uncle, and even to his blind old father, Isaac. One does not see much to like or admire in such a youth as that.

Esau's better side is quite as conspicuous. He carries his character in his frank, honest, ruddy face. He is quite impetuous, but full of good nature. He can be melted to tears, but good humour is his predominate vein. He is rough and ready. If hasty, he is not malicious. He can vow immediate vengeance, but let him cool and he will forgive and forget. He is very affectionate, and loves his aged father, and does his best to cheer his declining years. He wears his character upon his sleeve. He is known in a moment, and you would not fail to like him.

Why, then, should he be set aside? But let us look at his darker side. He has his failings. He was rash and impetuous. It was with him a word and a blow. His passion might cool, but if he could act at once, there was no self-command to restrain his wrath. Even his brother's life would not have been safe in his hands. All his actions are regulated by feeling, not by principle. He marries two Canaanitish wives, and when he sees that his father is displeased, he marries two Ishmaelites to repair the wrong. With him everything is for the present. He likes excitement. He cannot wait. His hunting is a symbol of the man. He would rather chase the animal and take it full grown, than wait quietly and patiently and rear it at home. He has no power of self-denial, no soul for promises. He is a thorough man of the world. He cannot live for the future. To him a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. And hence, under the

pinch of hunger, he is ready to sell his birthright. What that birthright involves we shall presently see. There may have been something in it that he would like to retain. But for the greater part he did not care. And all went together. He could not have part without the whole. One thing is clear. He cared nothing for the future, much less for waiting to bless the world. He would rather carve his own destiny than wait for God to open His way. He might have found a place in the kingdom, but a leader he could never be.

Turn now to Jacob and look at his bright side. For with all his faults he had his virtues too. He was deceptive, but all the deceptions recorded of him were in defence of his rights. We never find him seeking to defraud. He uses his cunning where others use their strength. This does not justify the falsehood, but it alters the complexion of the crime. He was not a grasping man. He took nothing from Esau for which Esau cared, and from Laban nothing but his due. If he bought the birthright, all that he did was to persuade Esau to cede some imaginary right; for there was no law which gave to Esau a prior claim, and by the Word of God the birthright was already promised to him. And the value he set on the birthright is the one thing in which he shines. In all probability the promise had been told him, and his ambition had been fixed to make it his own. And it would not take long to learn how little value it pos-

sessed for Esau, and how unsafe it would be in Esau's hands. Let Isaac die and Esau reign, and the birthright would be scattered to the winds. For what was this wondrous heirloom? In four hundred years this land shall be yours. Be true to God, keep clear of the Canaanites, and four centuries hence you shall be a great nation, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you. It was not worldly ambition, the possession of wealth and of an ordinary chieftainship, for which he longed, but the blessing of Abraham and the promise of God. It was this in which he believed. He had faith in God, faith in the future. He could wait God's time if only this birthright were secured. In his hand he felt it would be safe, and Esau might share it too. In Esau's it would be ruined, and the hopes of both destroyed. This was the birthright he so ardently desired, for which he was so ready to bargain, to plot, or even to deceive, and this was the birthright that Esau despised.

The purchase of *the birthright* is followed at length by the desire to obtain *the blessing* of his father Isaac. Esau had sold his birthright for a basin of soup, or as it is called here, a mess of pottage. The facility with which the transfer is made is startling at first. But we may well suppose that this was not the first time that the birthright had been talked of between them, and if Jacob had concealed his desire to obtain it, Esau had hardly failed to show how little he cared to possess it. But he was not prepared to give up the

blessing. To this he probably attached some superstitious value, and from affection to his father his blessing would have great worth for him. The whole scene is a natural one. Isaac, in his desire to give Esau his blessing, bids him prepare a savoury dish to stimulate his failing senses or assist his inspiration. Esau hastens to comply. Rebekah's apprehensions are aroused. The fulfilment of all her hopes and God's own prophecy seems to depend upon the frustration of Isaac's purpose. Hence her strange contrivance to deceive her husband, and divert his blessing to her favourite son. Jacob submits to her directions; the blessing is secured; and Esau is left to deplore his loss with bitter lamentation, and content himself with an inferior blessing.

But look a little more closely. They are all wrong together, and it is difficult to say which is the most to blame. Isaac wishes to secure the leading place in his family and in the preparation for the promised kingdom to his favourite son, in the face of a Divine prediction that it should not be so; and with his eyes open to the unfitness of Esau for such a post, he tries to overrule the purposes of God.

Esau has recklessly parted with his birthright because he despised it, and is just as reckless in coming for the blessing which he has thrown away, and charging Jacob with the sin which lay at his own door.

Rebekah believed in the prophecy, yet evidently

lost her faith. She could not trust in God to carry out His promises and fulfil His word. She resorted to tricks and deception to ensure the fulfilment of a Divine prediction, and attached more efficacy to the sacramental blessing of Isaac than to the clear and unqualified word of the Lord.

Jacob, in his intense eagerness to secure his end—an end which wronged no one, and which it was an honour to desire—lent himself to the most clumsy and consummate act of selfish deception which history records—a deception so rude, that its success can only be accounted for either from Isaac's dotage or from the direct power of God which bewildered his mind, as the angel bewildered the men of Sodom. The imitation of Esau's skin, the impossibility of imitating Esau's voice, and, to crown all, the bold and barefaced lie which followed Isaac's question, "Art thou my very son Esau?" Well may Luther say, "It is well it was not I, for I should have dropped the dish and run away in a fright." Never did a greater combination of wrong seem to effect a result which was right.

But if they all did wrong, they were all punished for the wrong they had done. If either had accomplished his purpose and reaped any advantage from the plot, it was never seen in the lifetime of any one of the four. But they all reaped of the wrong they had sown. Isaac, in the bitter remorse that seized him as the truth flashed upon his mind and he was convicted of his attempt to fight against God; and in

the loss of both his sons. Esau, in the agony of disappointment which seized him at the time, and in the growing feeling that he had no longer a place in his father's home. Rebekah, in her anguish at parting from the true light of her life, her favourite son, whom she never saw, from whom she probably never heard, again ; anguish that brought her grey hair with sorrow down to the grave, if it did not hasten her end. Jacob, in his twenty years' banishment, during which he experienced all the hardships of a slave, though living in his uncle's home; in the bitter strife and contention of his household ; in the craft and fraud that he experienced at Laban's hands ; and, to crown all, in the deception which his own children practised on himself, when they too combined to sell for a slave his favourite son, and persuaded him that he was dead. The Nemesis of evil deeds was never more plainly marked than in the fruit which this mistaken plot so plainly and so directly bore.

And what can we imagine to have been accomplished by it all ? We see what was done—the birthright bought, the blessing secured. But what if there had been no blessing and no sale ? Or what if Rebekah had not interfered, and Esau had come for the blessing ? Jacob would not have been excluded because Esau had received the blessing. Nothing that Isaac could do would have prevented the descendants of Jacob from inheriting the promise. The purposes of God are as firm as the everlasting hills.

Had Jacob not come, in all probability the intention of Isaac would have been as surely frustrated as that of Balaam when his intended curse was turned into a blessing. The blessing that Isaac pronounced was as surely the result of sudden inspiration as that of Jacob on his deathbed, of Moses, or of any of the prophets. And as Jacob's hands crossed to the heads of his grandsons in spite of Joseph's care, so would the right words have come from Isaac's lips, whether Esau or Jacob were there. And this gave it all its worth. Whatever the birthright embraced and the blessing conveyed, the worth of either, so far as human law could ordain, would not extend beyond an empty title or a few hundred sheep. The movements of history they could never control. But as an inspired utterance, such was its infallible truth, that it carried with it results which no one could set aside.

II.—*What were those rights?*

1. The history of Esau may be briefly told. About fifty miles to the south of Hebron, the general encampment of his father, is a range of mountains, running towards the south, and stretching from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akaba. It consists for the most part of barren chalk hills, capped with sandstone on the west, rising to an average height of two thousand feet. On the eastern side it slopes gradually off into fertile terraces and beautiful glens. At the time of Isaac it was inhabited by the Horites, a tribe so called be-

cause they were troglodytes, that is to say, people who built no houses, but excavated all their homes in the solid friable sandstone rock. The celebrated city of Petra, discovered by Burckhardt in 1812, still remains to show what their remarkable habits were.

It was here that Esau resolved to make his home, not as a restless wanderer, much less as a tolerated stranger, but as conqueror and king. It was just the country he would covet, fertile enough to supply all necessary wants, and with a boundless field for the pleasures of either war or chase. His expedition was successful. He took the country and formed a kingdom; and when the descendants of Jacob were pining in bondage, Esau could boast of a long line of kings. Twenty years from this time we find him with a body-guard of four hundred armed retainers coming to meet his brother Jacob as he returned from Haran to his native land. Four hundred years later his descendants are able to refuse the request of Moses for a passage through the defiles of Petra to the land of Canaan. And, as if to crown the bitter enmity born of this early strife, nearly two thousand years later a descendant of Esau seeks to slay the infant Messiah, the promised seed of Abraham, and another sits upon the throne and joins with Pilate in condemning Him.

What, then, did Esau lose?

In temporalities, literally nothing. In all probability his share of his father's wealth was not affected

by the birthright or the blessing. And if it were, what were a few thousand sheep to the four hundred men who had rallied round him and conquered the mountains of Seir? What a few score tents to two splendid cities whose inhabitants were subject to his sway? What a restricted range, subject to drought, in which they were tolerated foreigners, with possession deferred for four hundred years, to a large range of mountains every inch of which he could call his own?

The things lost were all spiritual, and nearly all prospective. To walk with God instead of carving his own career; to be the head of a pilgrim family instead of the possessor of broad lands captured by his sword; to be the leader of a Church instead of the king of a proud nation; to bless the world instead of being blessed himself—this was the loss he had sustained. The loss was that of the foremost place among the faithful. And never, we may be sure, did he count it a loss at all. Ask him if he would change with Jacob, and can you imagine his giving any other reply than a most emphatic No? Some think that he really came with his four hundred men either to punish or to frighten the brother who had done him such wrong. But why should he think of punishing, when all the gain was so evidently on his side? It is far more probable that he came to display his better fortune, or to help his brother who had made so little of his birthright. Each doubtless was satisfied, and neither would then have been willing to exchange. The faith of

Jacob was strong as ever, and he would not give up his hope in God for the richest kingdom in all the world. The faith of Esau was weak as ever, and he would not exchange the mountains of Seir for what to him was nothing but the vision of a dream, a country in the clouds, a castle in the air.

Can we misunderstand his elimination now? He is not removed from the family, the covenant, the Messianic hopes. From them he removed himself. It was from the foremost place, the post of leader, that he was set aside. For this God must have men of faith, with hearts set on Him, His purpose, and His way. Esau was not fitted for such a career as that to which his father had been called. He might have been a Mahomet, forcing opinion at the point of the sword, and beheading the infidel to show the power of the truth But a Paul or Luther such a man could never have been. The election of the leader must rest with God. But though He sets aside the unsuitable from the post of command, He sets no man aside from His covenant or kingdom till he sets himself aside. Esau might have lived to fill an honourable place, and his name have come down amidst the line of men of true renown had he not refused to walk by faith, and so despised his birthright.

2. Turn now to Jacob, and see how he vindicated the choice of God.

There was much sifting needed. He has in him the

making of a better man, but it will need a different process from any that he has yet gone through. There is gold, but there is more dross that must be burned away. There is life, but it is choked with disease that wants sloughing away.

He is running from home in fear, and running because he has sinned. But God will not let him feel as if He had cast him off. He has done evil, but he did it hoping that good would come. He is alone; cut off from his family. Has God, too, forsaken him? No! God spoke to Abraham there, and there God speaks to him. The ladder with its vision of angels, and above all the voice with its cheering words, are all he needs. He can go on in peace, for God has promised to bring him back again.

But promises do not effect an immediate change. His life with Laban brings out all the faults of his old character. He bargains and schemes, and at last seizes an opportunity to escape from a despotism under which he had groaned, but did not know how to shake off. He is doubtless a wiser, but not yet a much better man.

The turning-point had yet to come. He is not far on his journey when he is seized with terror. Laban is pursuing him. This difficulty over, for God interposes, another stares him in the face. Esau is at hand. With studious care he prepares to save his own life, first by the attempt to appease his brother, and then by so arranging his family that if the one half was

taken the other could escape. The brook Jabbok is before them. Over this they pass. He is left alone. He is about to cross, when a strong arm seizes him. His course is arrested. He knows not who it is. He wrestles hard, but it is of no avail. All night the way is barred. At length he awakes to the consciousness that it is no human arm. Now he no longer tries to force his way, but puts forth all his might to hold the Other. He weeps, he prays, he makes supplication, "I will not let thee go!" But ere he goes, one touch of His hand leaves marks through all Jacob's life. He lames and then He blesses. Can we not see the meaning? That sudden arrest shows that something is needed before he can enter the Promised Land. That wrestling resisted shows that till now he has been using his own resources, and although they have succeeded they will succeed no longer. The lameness shows that he who seeks with his own strength to gain his end in ways that God does not approve will carry the marks to his life's end. The blessing, the crossing, the change of name, the embrace of Esau, show that while he who takes his career into his own hands but multiplies difficulties and sows the seeds of trouble, he who commits himself and his ways to the Lord will find every trouble vanish, and the most insuperable difficulty melt away.

Jacob's conversion is complete. The furnace has done its work. His life is still eventful. The fruits of his errors still reappear in his four separate families,

and in the jealous contentions of his sons. But he himself has ripened into a man so full of integrity, of tenderness, and of faith, as to justify to every candid mind the choice of God. Little did he reap to gratify a mind set on earthly things. Few and evil, from every earthly standpoint, must the days of his pilgrimage appear. The better part of his life had been spent in one foreign land, and now in another his sun goes down. Yet his faith never wavers. With a vision bright and clear he looks forward to the day when the Promised Land shall be their own, and further still to that far-off day when all the families of the earth shall indeed be blessed in him. The nearer his death, the brighter his eye; till with prophetic inspiration he sees the tribes in their resting-place, though four centuries have yet to intervene, and, turning to his sons, charges them to bury him with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah. "There they buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac, and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."

The selection was made, and the law established. He who lives for himself lives for the present, lives without faith, can have no part in the promises of God, no place in the kingdom. He may have all besides that men admire, and win affection from all around. But God wants more than this. The grave will bury all his prospects: "weighed in the balance and found wanting" may be written on his sepulchre.

He who lives by faith—faith in God, His promises,

His purposes, His love, His Son—may set out with faults great and many. These may need the winnowing fan, the burning flame. They may appear again and again, like weeds deep rooted in the soil. But in spite of all his errors and all his sins, that faith shall save him. And while the Esau, whose virtues commanded our respect, goes down till all his baser nature wins the day; the Jacob, whose faults were so forbidding, kept true to one great purpose by his faith in God, shall rise till he has left his faults for ever buried in the past, and stands in character and in life with glorious hope at the very summit of the ladder that leads from earth to heaven.

MOSES AND THE PROPHETS.

TO DESPISERS OF GOD'S WORD.

"*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*"—LUKE xvi. 31.

IN this account of the rich man and Lazarus we are not to suppose that Christ intended to add anything to what the Jews already knew or believed concerning a future state. Those who believed in a future state at all, believed just what is here described. Tartarus and Paradise were familiar to them all. And Christ uses what they knew to teach what they ought to know.

And not only does he add nothing here, but He adds very little elsewhere. This is a marked characteristic of the teaching of Christ. In the clearest terms He affirms the reality and certainty of the life everlasting. Beyond all others He has brought life and immortality to light, yet He has done but little to satisfy that spirit of curiosity, that craving for particulars, so common to all. Where others paint in minutest detail, He gives a few bold touches, and leaves all the rest to be revealed when we know as we are known. In this respect the New Testament has really added but little to the Old.

Yet this is what, to many minds, appears so desirable a thing. And Christian imaginations, like those of Jews and heathen, have been busily employed in filling in the details omitted, hoping not only to satisfy curiosity, but to produce greater effect, by bringing out to view the secrets of the prison house. This appears to me to be one of the mistakes to which this parable directs attention. The story is well known. The rich man has led a selfish, sensual, worldly, and self-satisfied life. And now he finds his terrible mistake. He is in torment, as all must be who live only to enjoy the good things of this life, and are neither thoughtful of others nor rich towards God. And he has five brethren living like himself, and on the way to the same reward. The thought now comes into his mind: Had I but known all this, surely I never had been here; were I to return with the knowledge I have, what a different life I should lead! And if they knew, surely they would do the same. But how can they know? Could but some one return, one who has seen it all, seen me, they would repent. Could but Lazarus go!—This is his request. And to this Abraham replies, and Christ endorses the reply, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

I.—*Notice the desire expressed.*

"Send Lazarus to my father's house." We may well assume that Lazarus was well known, and that

they knew he was dead. Hence the desire amounts to this : Send some one whom they know to be dead. Some one, therefore, who will be recognised as having risen, and to whom they will listen, as bearing testimony to what he has seen, what he knows, what the state beyond the grave really is. The ground of this desire depends very much upon the kind of men these brethren are supposed to be.

Were they men who had no belief in a future state at all ? There were such men. Their life was influenced by no thought of eternity. Their maxim was, " Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Live while you live. If such were the men, the meaning of his petition would be, Let some one go to dispel the delusion, some one who can say, " I have seen," whose resurrection would demonstrate all that he affirms. Could they but receive such evidence, their infidelity would be scattered ; they would see, believe, feel, and repent, and never come to this place of torment.

Or perhaps they were men who did believe in a future state, and pictured it to themselves as it is here described. But all this had no influence upon their lives. Present pleasure and possession drove the thought from their minds. They knew, but never thought of it. Everything was done without any regard to what it would lead to. The path was trodden without a thought of the direction. It was a creed, a theory, not a present, practical belief ; if so, the desire would be, Let some one go, not to tell them it

is true, or to describe what he has seen, but by his own clear testimony, and the earnestness given by his own experience, to bring its reality so vividly before them as to make them think, and so do for them what they never do for themselves. Surely if this were done, done by one who had seen, they would repent!

Or perhaps they were Pharisees, who believed and taught and thought perpetually of all this. They could not be said to forget it. But it had no effect, for they always made sure that the joy was theirs, and the torment reserved for publicans and sinners. Paradise was their certain home. Elated with self-righteousness, they had nothing to fear. Perhaps the rich man was one of these, and he knew his brethren to be the same; if so, his desire would be, Let some one go who can tell what he himself has seen, who are in Paradise and who are here, who can describe how I have been wrecked while Lazarus has reached the haven in peace. Let him be able to say, "I have seen in torment those who once lived as you are living now." Surely then they would repent.

If the first, it would be proof that they needed; if the second, personal experience and earnest appeal; if the last, information.

This then would be the thought running through the whole: Are there any unbelieving as to the fact? if one rose from the dead it would drive all their unbelief away. Are there any engrossed in this world, heedless of the world beyond? if one rose from the

dead it would scatter their peace to the winds, and compel them to arise from their security, and live as those who have life beyond the grave.

Or are there any deceiving themselves, fancying that they are safe? If one from the dead could say, "From my own knowledge such as you are not in heaven," they would surely set their house in order and repent, and prepare to meet their God.

It would seem so. But the Saviour says No: "If men hear not Moses and the prophets, they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

II.—*The error contained in such a desire.*

We have not far to look. Lazarus might be raised from the dead, but the Sadducees remained sceptics still. Christ could bear witness of what he had seen; but the worldly did not repent. He bore clear testimony that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees would not avail, but this did not shake the self-righteousness of either Pharisees or Scribes. Nor is it difficult to see that it really would be so.

It was not much that Moses and the Prophets had told of the future state. But if a man, with the Old Testament in his hand, knowing that Moses and the prophets were inspired, could, in spite of all they said, persuade himself that there was no future state, then he would not be convinced though one rose from the dead. Proof he might bring; but it is not proof that such a man wants. He is shutting his eyes to

light, twisting revelation, perverting facts, distorting evidence now; and he would do the same then. He would pronounce it imposture, explain it away, question his own senses; anything rather than be convinced. More light may be desirable, more instruction needed; but if a man with His revelation in his hand says, "I will not believe that," till he is brought into a state of mind altogether different, he will not believe anything, will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead, or say that it is simply his state of mind that needs changing. He does not want convincing, but he wants the truth brought more prominently out, and kept more constantly before his mind. One is tempted to think that there may be times when a man gets so absorbed in the world, and the reality of a future state is so completely forgotten, that such an event would awaken or lead him to repentance. Yet I think we may see the Saviour's meaning even here. If a man with the Bible in his hand, believing all it reveals about eternity, can suppress it all, forget it all, bury it in the world, and live as if it were a delusion and a fable, he would do the same though the whole were repeated by one who rose from the dead. The impression would wear away again. If the world buried the one it would bury the other. If the love of the world were supreme before with all these facts before him, it would be supreme still. What he wants is not to have the truth depicted by another, but to have a

heart to keep it before himself; and he who wilfully hides what the Bible has declared would as wilfully hide whatever had been told by one who rose from the dead.

And if he is deceiving himself; if from some misconception he fancies that the inhabitants of heaven are such as he, when there are none like him in that home of the blest, surely if one could come and say, "I have seen the gulf between, and your own brother was on the wrong side," this would open his eyes. We might think so. But the words are not hard to understand. God has never left man in ignorance, or without the means of knowing who will be there. And if a man, instead of wanting to know the truth, wants rather to deceive himself; if his own desire is not to examine himself, but to be satisfied with himself; if he does not want to know whither he is going, but to be persuaded that he has nothing to fear; if he will not study what God has said, or hides from his eyes the revelation He has made, he would not lose this disposition though one rose from the dead. He might be alarmed for the moment, but if the spirit remained, he would quickly forget the revelation made, persuade himself that there was some mistake, or delude himself that he had really changed. If his great anxiety was not to find the right way, but to assure himself that he was already in it, he would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

There, then, is the source from which the wilful in-

difference springs. Such is the evidence and instruction contained in God's Holy Word, that he who in spite of that remains frozen in infidelity, intoxicated with the world, stupefied with self-righteousness, would not be convinced by the evidence, sobered by the vivid descriptions, or enlightened by the plain declaration, of one who rose from the dead,

III.—*The truth laid down.*

We must guard against misinterpreting the words.

They do not mean that a resurrection from the dead would never convey either evidence or conviction. This would be at variance with fact. At the resurrection of Lazarus "many believed," and the resurrection of Christ was followed by the conversion of thousands. Many who, with all their study of Moses and the prophets, failed to believe, when they were convinced that He had risen from the dead, believed. But that very fact illustrates His meaning, for the class of men referred to here remained unbelieving still.

Nor does he mean that under no circumstances would such an event alarm, awaken, and so effect a change. But that a man who sinks all sense of sin and danger, all desire for salvation, in the love of the world, may so deaden himself that nothing will convince and nothing awake.

It is a question of classes, but of classes very large, and classes in existence still. The words do not discourage all the efforts we can use. But if those efforts

fail, the great thing wanted is in the men themselves, and they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

1. The words may be taken as predicting a fact.

At the resurrection of Christ they were actually fulfilled. There were many in Jerusalem and throughout all the land whom His resurrection failed to lead to either repentance or belief. And in this respect the fulfilment continues still. All the evidence, the light, and the instruction afforded by that event are as clear to-day as when first the Saviour rose from the dead. The proof of the state beyond the grave, the reality given to it by the return of one who has been behind the veil, and the declaration made by one who knows who are in heaven and who are shut out, stand out as plainly in these pages as if it had been but yesterday that He rose. A risen Christ comes to men to-day, and they will not be persuaded though He rose from the dead.

2. They may be regarded as containing a vindication.

The request of the rich man implied that God had not done enough to bring him to his senses, and put before him the inevitable consequence of the life he led, and that his brethren like himself were left without the necessary mercy. And this Christ meets and overthrows. He does not say that increasing light is

useless, and that changed methods of setting forth the truth must be without effect. But there are none, above all of those possessing the word of God, who have not all that is necessary to convince of the truth, to show the way of salvation, and to persuade them to be reconciled to God. And if through their determined resistance to all this they render their hearts callous and cold, the fault is theirs, not God's ; and no addition to what they have would effect the change desired. They would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

3. And lastly, the words may be taken as addressing an appeal.

The words apply to us all. We have more light, more proof, more powerful motives than the men referred to here. God has indeed provided all you need. Christ has brought all you can desire. Are you, in spite of all, unaffected and unchanged ? Do you need clear evidence that after this life there is not only a country from which no traveller returns, but one in which life goes on, and you yourselves will live with all the powers of thought and feeling that you now possess ? No returning spirits could make this more sure than His teaching, the dying and the rising of Christ ! Do you want it brought out in all the vivid reality that can be given to it by one who describes what he has seen ? No words can be more burning, no pictures more graphic, than those of Christ, who

did speak that which He knew and testified that which He had seen. And could some departed one return to tell in the language of earth what is beyond the grave, he could only tell what you already know in words which Christ has already employed. And if you have any wish to know how and where the line is drawn that separates the mourners without the city from the joyful crowd within, no one returning from the dead could give you half the light which you can find in Christ's own word. It is not proof, or light, or revelation that men need, but a heart to use what they already have. And no more will ever come to them. None will rise from the dead to add to the revelation His word contains, and their appearance would not save you if this word fails. Do not, then, sit longing for something new, hoping for something fresh, or fancying that of something necessary for your conversion you have been unjustly deprived. In the power of Christ, in the call of Christ, in the death and resurrection of Christ, in the working of His spirit and the light of His word, we have all we need. Let not your hearts be shut against them all, or your mind deluded by the thought that you would surely repent if you had more, for if men believe not with the Bible they have, they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

CHRIST'S MISSION TO EARTH TO SAVE SINNERS.

"*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*"—1 TIM. i. 15.

THESE are not the words of a novice, or of one unqualified to speak. It was after thirty years of Christian work and Christian experience that Paul wrote the letter in which these words are found. During all that time he had been under the constant necessity of defending the evidences of the Gospel and the credibility of his message against every kind of objection and assault, and had had constant opportunities of testing the power of the Gospel, both in himself and in multitudes besides. It might have been enough that he could appeal to the revelation which he had received. But he could do more than that. And while proofs were ever accumulating that his word was faithful or credible, the evidence grew with every journey that he took and every year that he lived, that the truth he preached was worthy of all acceptation.

In writing to Timothy he reiterates this. He is

anxious to give Timothy his last earnest charge, and now that he is likely to be left to carry on his work alone, he shows him in these words his strong desire that he will let nothing shake his faith in the great fact of the Gospel, or lead him to conceal in the slightest degree the glorious truth, that the message of the Gospel is a message to all, and the salvation of Christ is provided for all. But why does he add these words, "of whom I am chief." It may seem strange that after thirty years of such a life he should call himself "the chief of sinners." Yet we are sure that he does it in all sincerity. Thirty years could not obliterate from his mind the circumstances under which he was saved. His strong prejudice, his passionate hatred, his cruel persecution, his unmerciful treatment of even the women who believed, his pleasure as he stood by the side of Stephen, his thirst for blood, the eagerness with which he hunted down his prey, the zeal with which he searched for their hiding-places, and the purpose for which he was going to Damascus—all stood as fresh before his mind as if they had happened but yesterday, and, far off as it was, he could not help feeling, "Christ saved the chief of sinners when He saved me." And as he thought of that, he wanted no other proof that Christ would save all than the fact that He had saved him. It was proof enough to him, and His warrant for declaring it. It was proof enough for others, and their warrant for believing it. Did any one doubt

whether he could be saved ; this was enough to dispel all doubts, "He saved me." And with that fact ever before him, he was both constrained and warranted to proclaim wherever he went that it was "worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

These were not unmeaning or needless words, but were evidently written with the thought of the many who either denied the fact, or disputed its acceptability and worth.

I.—*Look, in passing, at the objections which the apostle probably had in mind.*

1. There were some who denied the fact.

I do not suppose that any cared to deny that Jesus had lived, or that Jesus had died. But Paul's words affirm far more than this. They imply that He was the promised Messiah, that He had come from some other world to this, and that His great purpose was to save. This was what they denied. Some, denied that He was the Messiah. The Jews, as a body, refused the evidence, and rejected Him.. Some, that He had ever come from any other sphere. His pre-existence and consequent divinity both Jews and Gentiles denied. And some, that He was any more a Saviour than any other man. They might esteem His wisdom, admire His character, be moved by His heroic suffering and His willing death, but none of these sufficed to lead them to look upon Him as a

Saviour—their Saviour, the Saviour of the world. This, then, is what the apostle so firmly meets. And this is what he so boldly declares. He was the promised Christ. He came from above when He came into the world, and to save sinners was the purpose for which He came.

2. But there were others who disputed its acceptability and worth.

There were many who had no wish to deny the truth of what the apostle said. They had no care to affirm either its fallacy or its truth. Their objections were very different from these.

Some altogether denied the need of salvation. Some thought themselves too good for the Gospel. And some thought the Gospel too good for them.

Some denied their need of salvation. There never was a time when it was needed more. Since the time of the flood the world never had sunk lower, if so low. Men never were farther from God; iniquity never abounded more. Men were never less able to help themselves; yet they never were less conscious of their danger or their need. Never were they in denser darkness, and never more ready to say, "We see." Paul might preach of a Saviour; but they denied their danger and their sin. The Gospel might offer salvation; but they would not admit that they required to be saved. All the light they wanted they could get without Him. All the dress they needed

they had at their own command. Blind to their own state, and blind to all their danger, they laughed at one who offered salvation, and never asked what they must do to be saved.

To them Paul's words apply. He might have said "And such was I, as blind, as conceited, as secure as you. I never thought I was a sinner. I had no sense of danger, and no idea that I needed to be saved. But when my eyes were opened I saw that I was the chief of sinners, that all my righteousness was as filthy rags, that my hope was a delusion, and my safety a dream. And then I saw that it was a glorious saying, worth my acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And now with the same confidence I affirm that it is equally worthy of yours."

There were some, again, who thought themselves too good for the Gospel. Whatever they thought of themselves, they believed themselves far in advance of all its teaching, and far too good to stoop to so humiliating a plan for reaching salvation. They would not believe that these fishermen of Galilee or this tentmaker from Tarsus could teach wisdom and truth superior to the learning of Rabbinical schools or the lectures of philosophical halls. Nor could they bring themselves to accept salvation from one who was crucified, much less to seek it at the foot of the cross. Their pride could never stoop to that confession of worthlessness and sin, to that repentance and

self-denial, that humility and faith which the Gospel required. They might need both light and salvation, but they were too good for the Gospel to save them. And to them again the apostle's words apply. He could say, "and such was I. The one great thing that so embittered my hatred and persecution was that I could not bear the thought that we were to get wisdom from fishermen of Galilee, or that they should dare to assert that the noble race of Israel, the proud and perfect Pharisee, must seek salvation from one who had been condemned, and accept a crucified man as its Saviour and Lord. I was tired of hearing their perpetual reiteration of the command to repent, and the summons to believe in Jesus. I would never stoop to that. I would rather sweep them from the face of the earth. But when that light flashed upon my mind, and those words pierced my conscience and my heart, I did indeed fall to the ground. I never fell so low, never was so low. Not stoop to the Gospel! My only thought now was, Can I ever reach it, ever rise high enough to touch it at all? I saw that Saviour so despised, that Gospel so ridiculed, those men so persecuted, high as heaven itself above me. And then I knew, that if it were but true that Christ died for me, it was indeed a fact worthy of my acceptation. And from my own experience I affirm that it is truly worthy of yours."

But there were some who thought the Gospel too good for them. They saw their sin and danger; they

desired salvation. With broken hearts they cried out, "What must we do to be saved?" "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" But they could not yet thank God through Jesus Christ, or rejoice that there was no condemnation. The news seemed too good to be true. They could believe all except that it was for them. We have no proof that such feelings of anxiety or doubt ever arose from the thought of a limited atonement, or that the idea of a limited atonement had been promulgated at all. But from whatever source it arose, we can have no hesitation in saying that it was there. The first conviction of sin would be sure to produce it. The "slough of despond" is no invention of a later time. The deeper the conviction of sin, the harder would it be to believe that there could be salvation. But if there were any such, the words of Paul applied to them. To them, also, he could say, "And such was I. For three days I was in darkness, the darkness of despondency. I could not believe that there was salvation for me. I was in the depth of despair. I could not see a gleam of light. Not a ray of hope streamed into my heart. I could not even pray. At last I struggled out. I know not how it was, but I resolved to pray—to pray to that Jesus whom I had persecuted—and as I prayed I thought I saw a man, more like an angel than a man, come to my side, and say, 'The Lord Jesus hath sent me.' And it was true. And now I say that if I was saved none need despair. It was not too good to

be true. It was true that Christ died for me, and it is quite as true that Christ died for you. And as it was worthy of my acceptance, it must be worthy of yours."

II.—*The declaration which the words contain.*

1. The apostle asserts the credibility of the fact. It is a faithful, credible, trustworthy saying. There have always been men who in various ways and on various grounds have tried to bring into discredit the great facts of the Gospel; yet none of these attempts have hindered those facts from gaining so firm a hold upon the minds of every generation, that though eighteen hundred years have passed away, they stand out as clear and sharp in all their outlines as if they had happened in our own day. Like granite peaks lifting their awful form against the evening sky do these great facts stand out beside all others, the clearest, sharpest, the best defined of all the facts of bygone days.

But are they facts? No question of more solemn moment has ever been asked, ever can be asked, than this. We who believe in Christ, believe that He died, died for us, that He came into the world to save sinners, that He lives to save; are we resting our hopes on a fiction, building on sand, or painting our paradise on a cloud? If this were possible, we have no hope, for there is no other name given among men by which we can be saved; and if this has not been given, no name has been given at all.

But it is, happily, neither a fiction nor a doubtful fact. This is the apostle's clear ringing assertion, "It is a faithful saying." And other apostles take up the strain. John says, "That which we have seen, declare we unto you." And Peter, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." No fact of all the past is more surely attested, more variously confirmed, or more strongly supported than this. Eye witnesses have handed it down, and they who heard them have repeated the tale. If it be not a fact, then the world was revolutionised, idolatry overthrown, society regenerated, and tens of thousands converted by a fiction. The miracle of the Gospel is great; but this would be greater still. And this marvellous phenomenon would stare us in the face, that the greatest power for good, that has worked for eighteen hundred years, is after all to be traced, not to a well-founded fact, but to a delusion that has no foundation in the events of history at all. Believe it who can! Probability is all on our side, and more than probability; for what the power of the Gospel confirms is here affirmed by one who had every means of knowing what he declared. It is no cunningly devised fable, but a faithful saying, a certain fact, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

2. But the apostle declares still further the universal acceptability of the fact.

For any fact to be "worthy of all acceptation"

there must be some way in which all are interested in the fact. There are multitudes of faithful sayings or credible facts in history or science which no one has reason to doubt, but which have so little bearing upon us, and therefore so little interest for us, that it would be the height of absurdity to proclaim them as "worthy of all acceptation." Why, then, do so here?

(*a*) Because all are sinners, and need salvation.

As a fact, the coming of Christ is as worthy of belief by angels fallen and unfallen as by men. But it is universal sin alone that makes it so worthy of universal acceptation. It was the assurance of this which made the apostle so earnest in the effort to carry the Gospel from land to land. It was not what he saw only, but what he knew. The scenes were sad enough. But when he had no repulsive scenes before him, when he stood in Athens among scenes of beauty, surrounded by the highest works of art, and with a crowd before him of men educated and refined, he had no hesitation in addressing them all as sinners, as sinners who were called to repentance, sinners who would be called to judgment, and sinners for whom Christ died. Of all his hearers not one could form an exception here. And because they were sinners, needing salvation, therefore, and for no other reason, was the fact worthy of their acceptation.

And for this reason it is worthy of acceptation still. The Gospel has made great changes in the world. Vices have been driven out and utterly extinguished.

Sins have been suppressed or driven out of sight. In the days of Paul vice was the rule, morality the exception. It is now happily the reverse, and hence the danger that consciousness of sin should become the exception too. How many there are growing up who have not yet been brought to look at this fact at all: that they are sinners as certainly, and need salvation as thoroughly, as the thief, the gaoler, or the crowd upon Mars' Hill!

There is no exception even in you. You have not gone so far; but the question is not the distance you have gone, but the direction in which you are going. If a man is going wrong, he needs as much to turn back for a few yards as for many miles. You have not lived so long, perhaps; but the question of time can make no difference. If a man is building on a quicksand, whether he is only laying the foundation, or is covering in the roof, he must begin again. And you, whether young or old, whether you have gone far in sin or but a little way, do need to repent, and need salvation. If you have not repented, you are still unsaved. If you have not believed in Christ, you are still unsaved. You cannot save yourself, you cannot reach heaven without salvation. None but Christ can save you, and hence the fact is worthy of your acceptation.

(*b*) Because Christ died for all, and all can be saved.

I have said that the only thing that can make the fact worthy of all acceptation is that it is of interest

to all; and the only thing that could make it of interest to all is that there is salvation for all. If there were no other words than these, this passage would be enough to prove that a partial or limited atonement could never have entered into the apostle's mind.

How could salvation for the few be worthy of all acceptation? Just imagine yourselves commissioned to deliver such a message as this. Fancy the gates of starving Paris[1] thrown open, and a herald riding through the city with the tidings, "Hear all you starving ones the good news of salvation; ye are all perishing for want of food, but this is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptation, food is at the gate, it is entering now, but there is not food enough for all." Or imagine a shipwrecked crew struggling for life. A boat draws near, and one on board calls out, "I have good news; we have come to save; it is a fact worthy of all acceptation that we have come to rescue you, but the boat is not large enough to hold you all." And such would have been the message of the apostle, if when he wrote these words he had meant to say it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ came into the world to save sinners, but has not provided salvation for them all. Surely, if language be plain and words sincere, we have at least the warrant the apostle's example gives to say to every man, not only "Christ died for sinners," but "He

[1] Preached during the Franco-German war of 1870–71.

truly died for you." And because He died, He lives to save, He is able to save, mighty to save, longing to save. This is the fact so worthy of your acceptation.

With this message we come to you. But are you saved? We may offer, but have you accepted? The door is open, none hinder your entrance but yourselves. Once more the call is addressed to you. Will you put it from you again? Great may be your sin, but the love of God, the atonement of Christ, go deeper than your sins. He is able to save to the uttermost. Let Him then save you. He invites, and will not cast away. All invite. Do not then cast Him away. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW.

"*Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*"—MATTHEW vi. 34.

THESE are the closing words of one of the most important sections of the Sermon on the Mount. The object of the whole section is to impress upon the minds of Christ's disciples the fact that we are the object of God's incessant thought and care; that with such a God as He is there can be no need for anxiety or fear; that all Creation teaches the thoughtfulness and care of God. He feeds the birds, though they have neither storehouse nor barn; how much more will He feed us who have both? He clothes the fields with verdure, and dresses the lily in richer costume than any that even Solomon wore; and cannot, therefore, fail to see that His own children are protected and clothed.

The allusion which Christ here makes to lilies, grass, and birds, and the comparison which He institutes, might seem to imply that God will surely provide for us, though we should do no more than they. But the contrast which He Himself points out, that they

neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, while we can do all three, shows rather that God does intend us to utilise all that we possess. The meaning, therefore, is not, get rooted immovably like the lily, or live like the birds of the air, and God will feed you as they are fed ; but, use as they do all the powers with which God has endowed you, and He will take care of the rest.

There are times when there is scarcely anything that can be done, and there are proofs that at such times as these He will not fail to interpose. If He bring Israel to the banks of the Jordan, or the coast of the Red Sea, He will clear a pathway through the waters, that their progress may not be stayed. And if Elijah go to Cherith at His word, even the ravens shall feed him, that his life may be prolonged till his work is done. But there are some to be found, who, if not quite prepared to try the experiment for themselves, do read in the words a condemnation of the little faith that will persist in making provision and cherishing forethought, and dare not try the mode of life of lilies or of birds. Yet there is nothing in the comparison to encourage such an attempt, nor in the words themselves to require it. God has given to the birds the instinct by which they seek their food, build their nests, and migrate to warmer climates to escape the winter's cold. And when this has been done, He feeds them. If the nest be not built, the young must all perish ; and if the cold overtake them no miracle

preserves. And so with the wisdom and knowledge, the skill and the strength, the opportunities and instructions, which we have received. These all must be used, or the analogy fails. For time and eternity all must be employed. And when we have done our little part, as birds or flowers do theirs, then, and not till then, have we any warrant to fold our hands, and say, "We will leave the rest to God." The "Bank of Faith" is indeed a bank that can never be broken. But it is possible, by presumption, to overdraw your account, and your draft will then be dishonoured. You may draw perpetually, and that without misgiving, but take heed what and how you draw. Thought for the morrow is a duty as well as a sin; and to him who fails to take the right thought, it is no excuse that he also carefully guarded against taking the wrong.

I.—*In a certain sense, thought for the morrow is our constant duty.*

Thought for the future is the mark of wisdom, not of folly. It is fostered by education, a mark of civilisation, and the essence of true religion. It is the savage who feasts to-day and starves to-morrow, because he takes no thought for the morrow. It is the base and improvident, who recklessly squander all their earnings, never considering how soon those earnings may cease, or they themselves be laid aside. It is the intemperate and licentious who never think of the

morrow, indulging the passion of the moment, and shutting their eyes to the inevitable result. And it is the careless and godless who live on from day to day, making no preparation for death, laying up no treasure in heaven, and so taking no thought for the morrow. Thinking for the morrow is the life of all diligence, the soul of all enterprise, the spur to all true progress in things both temporal and eternal—the only way to pass our life on earth in real prosperity, or to find and keep the path to heaven. The lessons of Christianity all take this for granted. "The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps," and therefore thought for the morrow. It was the foolish who had no such thought, who lighted their lamps and took no supply.

1. First, then, it is our duty to calculate the probabilities of the morrow.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." As the lily packs up all its life within the bulb, that it may be defended from the sharp frosts of winter, and the bird migrates to a warmer clime at the first warning of the approaching cold, so should we prepare for what is coming, as well as endure or enjoy what has already come. You may build your house in the dry bed of a creek, when the ground is hard and the skies are sunny; but if you have taken no thought for the probabilities of a flood, the rains will soon pour through upon your head, and the fruit of all your labour be swept away.

And so may you go out into the world and live your daily life in safety when all is fair and helpful ; but if you have taken no thought for the temptations and troubles, the affliction and death, that surely await you, if you have taken no armour and made no provision, no miracle will be wrought either to defend or save.

2. Secondly, we ought to trace the effect of present deeds, and so take thought for the morrow.

Nothing ends with itself. The deeds of to-day are all seeds of to-morrow. The thoughts and acts of youth bear their fruit as life goes on. The truth or falsehood, wisdom or folly, kindness or selfishness, honesty or fraud of the young, are living seeds that grow and ripen and seed again in the character of the woman or the man. And all through our life, in our attitude towards Christ, our faith or unbelief, our obedience of resistance, our love or hardness of heart, we are sowing the seeds of eternity. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If, then, we are sowing for a future and certain harvest, it can only be folly of the most disastrous kind that sows on with no thought of the reaping, and takes no thought for the morrow.

3. We ought to prepare for what *may* come, as well as for what surely *will*, and so take thought for the morrow.

Of all the disciples who were then standing around the Saviour, not one could tell what his fate would be. It was quite certain that some would be persecuted, and even put to death. But no one could foresee upon whom the blow would fall. What, then, did Jesus do? Did He foretell to each his separate fate that he might be prepared? By no means. His one command to *all* was, Take up your cross and follow Me. Let every one be ready to share My sufferings and My death. All will not be called to tread the same path of sorrows, and lay down their life. Some will. Be all prepared for what may only be required of the few. And *we* also know not what a day may bring forth. In the world through which we have to pass there are fierce temptations, slippery paths, heavy trials, deep sorrows, and early deaths. Some of us will pass through all our journey and never encounter any of these. Others will seem singled out to bear them all. Yet we have no light that helps us to foresee whose way will be smooth, and safe, and sunny; whose rough and stormy and full of danger. No warning foretells the early death, and none can calculate their days. Special preparation for what *will* come is impossible. Be always ready, therefore, for what *may*. Have your feet shod with preparation. Readiness for all events is the true thought for the morrow.

In this sense, then, the wise will always think. Wherever preparation is possible we are bound to make it. God expects it. Christ Himself inculcates

it. And, as we shall see, it is encouraged rather than reproved by the words which He uses here: "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

II.—*There is a sense, however, in which thinking for the morrow is really an impossibility.*

Every day necessarily brings with it its own circumstances and demands, and out of these spring all our thoughts, our feelings, and our deeds. The thoughts of the day all take their rise in the circumstances of the day. The feelings are for the most part produced by the occurrences of the day. And the actions are necessarily modified by our condition during the day. These we can never foresee, and therefore we cannot anticipate.

1. We cannot perform to-morrow's duty to-day.

We may fill up to-day with extra work, and think we are thereby leaving less for the morrow. But whatever we do, the real duties of the morrow come with to-morrow, and by no possibility can we perform them to-day. The early post may bring some unexpected call to take down our tent, or remove, like Abraham, to a country that God will show us. There may open up some new career of usefulness or prosperity, demanding new energies, and bringing new duties in its train. A change in our affairs may make all our work useless, so that everything has to be

done again. An attack of illness may lay aside, and the duty of the day may be to suffer patiently and do nothing. Or the warning voice may be heard, "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live;" and the great duty may be not to prepare new plans or finish old ones, but to settle our affairs, wind everything up, and make ready to go home. To-morrow must bring its duties with it, and we cannot perform them to-day.

2. We cannot make to-morrow's progress to-day.

We may do all we can to advance; every thought and energy may be concentrated upon this. But however far we get, the real progress of to-morrow cannot be made. The road will not open till to-morrow arrives; the door is closed, and we know not which God will open for us to go through. The day's march belongs to the day. The pillar of cloud and fire will not move an inch beyond the journey of the day. And we cannot go before it. We can only follow where it leads, and none can tell in what direction to-morrow's progress lies. However far we go to-day, the real journey of to-morrow cannot be made till it comes.

3. We cannot bear to-morrow's burden to-day.

We may pile load upon load of cares for the morrow, till we are almost crushed by the weight, and fancy that we shall thereby have less to bear, or be better

able to bear it. But the real burden of to-morrow will not be packed till to-morrow. It is out of to-morrow's actual mixture of joy and sorrow, blessing and trial, prosperity and adversity, that the burden is prepared. And God never tells beforehand what it will be. We may easily add to the burden of to-day, but the burden of to-morrow we can never bear.

4. We can never fight to-morrow's battles to-day. We meet with enemies of some kind every day of our lives, spiritual enemies who cannot be evaded, and must be fought. And we may often think, when we are gaining some unwonted victory over ourselves or others, that we are conquering the foes of to-morrow as well as those of to-day. We have dealt our blows so sturdily, and with such glorious success, that we can hardly imagine how, at least for a time, they can possibly assail us again. In other words, we have resisted temptation so successfully that we fancy we shall surely be free from temptation for a very long time to come. But to-morrow's enemies are not here to-day; or, if they are, they will use very different weapons when they come again. Every new circumstance, new event, new feeling, either raises a new foe or furnishes a new weapon with which to fight. We may have conquered all the enemies that gather round, but we dare not therefore lay our armour aside. Fresh enemies come with every day; and often we do not even hear the tramp of their footsteps,

or see the dust of their approaching march, till they are ready to open upon us. Successive victories will make us strong, but never make us safe. The triumph is more easily gained, but the battle of the day must be fought on the day. We cannot fight for to-morrow.

"To-morrow never comes." The to-morrow of our dreams, our hopes or fears, our planning and preparing, never really arrives. The day expected is always different from the day itself. Some things expected may occur, but others are so different that the whole is changed. Let us do what we will, to think *for* to-morrow is out of our power. We can only do with to-day.

III.—*In the sense of Christ, thought for the morrow is both possible and wrong.*

What Christ here condemns is not wise forethought nor impossible prediction, but that distracting care about the future which ever spoils to-day by bringing in to-morrow. The very word means that. The expression "take no thought" really signifies, do not let your mind be divided, disturbed, or distracted. "*Be not anxious* about the morrow; the morrow will be anxious about itself." Do what you will, you cannot prevent the latter fact. Why, then, spoil all by doing the former as well?

1. Do not neglect to-day's duties while brooding over to-morrow's.

There is a sense in which thought of the future is the best sign-post or spur. As seamen know how to steer by watching the lights or landmarks in the distance, so is it often by looking forward that the wisest and best determine their way. The light of to-morrow helps us to choose, and the pressure of to-morrow urges us forward. But it just as often has a different effect. By dark and gloomy forebodings men paralyse their energies and lose their strength. In bright day-dreams of things to come they neglect the opportunities that lie close around. Building castles in the air, they lay but few stones on a solid foundation. There are many who are ever wasting their time in taking thought for the future. Their life is all expectation. Either they do nothing because all that they do is sure to be spoiled, or they will do nothing *to-day* because they expect to do more on the morrow. They will not creep with the tortoise, for they are sure before long to run with the hare. Or they bury their one talent in the earth, as they are in daily expectation of receiving five.

Such thought for the morrow is as sinful as it is disastrous and absurd. And Christ does condemn such thought for the morrow as this. Let nothing distract or draw you away from the duties that lie at your door. Whatever you may expect, God expects to-day's duties to be performed to-day. He looks for nothing more, and with nothing less will He ever be satisfied.

2. Do not spoil to-day's happiness by to-morrow's gloom.

God rarely draws the shadow of to-morrow's cloud over the sunshine of to-day. The light of every day is sure to be obscured by some shadows of its own. But there are few days so dark that some rays of sunlight do not pierce the gloom. Yet how often it is we who deepen the gloom, and spoil all the bright sunlight by drawing over it the very mist that God has so mercifully kept away.

We are all inclined to anticipate trouble and darken the present by future sorrow, either imaginary or real. Sometimes, indeed, this is almost inevitable. Things look so dark that we can hardly believe for a moment they will ever brighten again. It may be so. You cannot foresee or tell what will be on the morrow. But do not make things worse than they are. Do not show yourself ungrateful for a passing respite, or temporary relief, because the pain is sure to return. Be thankful for a lull in the storm, and do not spoil it all by saying, "It will soon be as bad as ever." Or even if you are in the midst of the hurricane, and the winds are still blowing with all their fury, and the waves are running high, do not make it worse by saying, "They will blow for ever, and it will never be calm again." Make the most of your confidence, and of the peace your Saviour gives. He will divide the clouds, and hush the winds, and still the waves, and there will surely be a great calm. Let the bright

light cheer you, though it shine but for a moment, and the cloud soon closes again. It is God's own angel sent to you. The clouds have parted to let it pass. It tells how soon a little wind may brighten all the sky; and while they are dark and lowering, it whispers, "Be not dismayed: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Spoil not to-day by the shadow of to-morrow. "Take no thought for the morrow."

3. Do not shake to-day's faith by to-morrow's fear.

There is always ground for strong confidence. If we take things at their worst, there is every reason to trust and not be afraid. And whatever reason there is to-day, there will be just the same reason to-morrow. The same promises will be there, the same Saviour, the same everlasting arms. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Yet how often does it happen that, even when we are upheld, we are in continual dread lest to-morrow we should fall; and in the midst of everything to encourage faith we spoil it all by fear. We are like travellers who have climbed every mountain, and crossed every stream, and yet will persist in marring their pleasure, and depressing their spirits, and drawing from their strength, by the fear that to-morrow's mountain will be too steep to climb, or its river too deep to ford. Do not yield to such thoughts as these. He who has helped through the sea will help through the desert. He who has de-

feated the Amalekites will not let the Amorites triumph. Hold fast to-day. Be satisfied that you are safe. Leave all the rest to Him.

> "His love in times past forbids me think
> He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink :
> Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
> Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through."

4. Do not lose to-morrow's support by forestalling to-morrow's need.

"As thy day, so shall thy strength be." God gives us help from day to day, but He does not promise help to clear away to-morrow's difficulties or bear to-morrow's burden. He is "a present help in trouble." But the trouble must be *present*, or the help will not come. He may give us strength to bear the heaviest burden of the day; but if we double the burden by adding to-morrow's weight, we shall have some weight to bear by ourselves, and fall beneath the load. He will give strength to perform the duties of the day; but if we try to-morrow's as well, we shall not receive strength for them. We shall be able to vanquish every foe and overcome every temptation that we meet with in our way; but if we go beyond the way appointed, rushing into temptation, or raising other foes, we shall be too feeble for the fight, and have no pledge of victory. The sea, which will part to-morrow if God calls us to go through, will assuredly drown us to-day if we attempt it uncalled. Each day does God pay in all that we need for the day; but if we draw for

the morrow as well as to-day, we shall find there is nothing to draw. "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow." Anxiety may add to the burden and toil, but will never bring strength for either.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Not only because it is as much as we can bear, but because that alone will come attended with sufficient strength to bear it. We may be able to perform every duty, bear every trouble, conquer every foe, when they come, though we never beforehand thought that we could. And we never need wish to feel sure. Boasting assurance often turns into nothing but cowardice and flight. Vain confidence trembles and falls, when faint-heartedness grows bold and triumphs. Have faith in God, and you have nothing to fear.

"Put thou thy trust in God,
In duty's path go on;
Fix on His Word thy steadfast eye,
So shall thy work be done.

"Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time—thy darkest night
Shall end in brightest day."

But some of you have need enough for anxiety. Should storms arise, you have no safe roads in which to take shelter, and no means of shortening sail. The storm will find you unprepared and exposed to all its fury; because you have never "fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the gospel," and have not that hope which is as "an anchor, sure and steadfast."

There is no Christ with you to bid the waves be still, for you have rejected Christ. Temptations will come thick and strong, and you have no armour that can bear their assaults. Death will come, may come at any hour, and you have no one to be with you in the valley of the shadow of death, for you would not come to Christ, though again and again you heard Him calling. Christ never said to such as you, "Be not anxious about the future." He rather bids you fill your hearts with anxiety, by telling you of enemies and dangers, of certain death, and after death the judgment. You cannot be too anxious till you find rest to your souls by coming to Him. Look well to the future. Take all thought for the morrow. See whither thou art going. Mark the way, how full of danger; the end, how dark and awful; the outer darkness, towards which you are going, how deep and full of despair! Then turn to Christ. Give Him your faith. Put all your trust in Him. Mark well the way He leads, and follow Him. And then, through all your future course, whatever comes, be it life or death, work or sickness, gain or loss, you will have all you want in Christ, and need "take no thought for the morrow."

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE DEATH OF THE CHRISTIAN.*

"*This spake He, signifying by what death He should glorify God.*"—JOHN xxi. 19.

THE chief end of man is to glorify God. In whatever way God is glorified, whenever this is really done, we have accomplished the highest purpose of our existence. For the most part, and perhaps quite naturally, we associate the glorifying of God with our life; and it is very rarely that we associate it at all with death. Yet the apostles did the one as naturally as the other. Thus Paul speaks of Christ as being "magnified" by His death. And John, referring to the death of Peter, can find no expression more fitted to embody his thought than "the death by which he should glorify God."

We know nothing with certainty concerning Peter's death. Tradition has handed down an account of his visit to Rome, and his crucifixion there. But these are both involved in doubt. It is probable that he died a martyr's death, though we have no sure account of this. The words of Christ seem to indi-

* Preached on the occasion of the death of Mr. John Hamilton, of Melbourne, December, 1873.

cate as much. They are apparently descriptive of martyrdom.

But it would be wrong to take the words of John as meaning that it was only because he was a martyr that he glorified God. There have been times when this thought has prevailed, but the apostles did not teach this. John himself did not die a martyr's death; yet he surely glorified God in his death as truly as Peter or Paul. The glorification was not his martyrdom, but the cause of Christ which he was so faithfully upholding when he died, the faith and spirit in which he laid down his life, and the way in which his death not only displayed the glory *of* God, but brought at the same time glory *to* God.

And thus the words are descriptive, not of an apostle's or a martyr's death alone, but of the true aspect of every faithful Christian's departure. The circumstances may vary in a thousand ways, but the fact is the same; and in the true believer's death all is summed up that we can possibly desire, when it can be said of him that by his death as truly as by his life he glorifies God.

I.—*Let us look at this view of death.*

There has been only one kind of death with which men, as a rule, have agreed to associate the thought and name of glory. Death on the battle-field has monopolised it. Such a death has been invested with all the brilliant honours that a country could devise,

and with all the splendour that poetry and art could fling around it. To maintain the enthusiasm so needful to a military life, it has ever been taught that, if it was glorious to return with the scars of victory, it was more glorious still to die. With feelings of the same kind did the early Christians, in times of persecution, seek to inspire themselves and others, and courted glory by dying for their Lord. But death, under all circumstances, is suggestive of something very different from that which glory apparently implies. The first lesson that it teaches is that of weakness, helplessness, defeat. Man has been worsted in his conflict with mortality. A stronger than he has stripped him of all the spoils of his life, and all the glory of his frame. Glorious he *was*, but what is he now? Ichabod stands written on every tomb. And if death thus robs man of his glory, does it not seem to rob God of His glory too? The eye with which the living man scans all the wondrous works of God, surveying alike the beauties of the heaven and earth, does, when possessed of all its brilliancy and power, celebrate His handiwork, and bring glory to His name. The lips with their language, and the ears which catch the sound; the hand with its marvellous skill and loving grasp, and the brain with its mysterious power of thought—these all declare the *glory* of God. But when we die, what glory can come from a lifeless frame? All the wondrous work is marred, the beauty gone, the power paralysed. There is nothing left now

to bring glory to God or pleasure to man. There is no power remaining. The lips have no language. There is no beauty; all is humiliating; the glory is gone, and defeat is written on the brow: all says there is no deliverance in that war. And, great as the glory life may bring, how can death bring glory to God?

If this were all, it would be hard to find a reply. An unbeliever might, indeed, content himself with the philosophical reflection that it was part of a universal law. But take death as we see it, and surely all the glory comes from life, whilst with death it passes away. And the Scriptures themselves do not associate the thought of glory with death itself. It is rather a triumphant enemy; the fruit of sin, associated with that which first marred His work, and robbed Him of all His glory. Not here, then, not in these fearful facts of death, but somewhere else, we must look for that by which even in death a Christian glorifies God.

II.—*In what way, then, does death glorify God?*

If we take the death of Peter as an illustration, this is what we find. He had led a noble life. He had been a faithful follower and a successful preacher. He had converted thousands, wrought miracles, and uttered prophecies. Bold and daring, he had been true to Christ in the face of threats and dangers. But his enemies had triumphed; and a stronger even than they held him in its grasp, for he was dead. How

did it bring glory to God to let them conquer, and to let him die? The answer is here—

1. God is glorified by a Christian's faith.

God's highest honour is our confidence. All the glory that He gets from this material world and this wondrous frame is not to be compared to that which He gets from the spirit that animates a Christian's soul. He has had dishonour enough from its sin, its fall, its daring hostility and unbelief. And He seeks no higher honour than its faith, with all its train of love, devotion, holiness, and truth. His faith God tries amidst all the changes of life. He tries it amidst childish disappointment and pain; amidst youthful sorrows, temptation, and sacrifices; amidst the adversities, losses, anxieties of riper years; and amidst the weakness, decrepitude, and gloom of old age. Dost thou still trust Me? is His constant appeal. His one fixed purpose is to educate us to trust in Him. And he who does with simple faith trust in God though Jesus Christ has reached a height that none can surpass, and renders Him glory equal to the angels. "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him," is a declaration of faith that He delights to hear, and the attainment of this is the fulness of His desire. And here it is that death does bring Him glory. It was not that Peter stood a prisoner, a martyr, in the hands of his enemies and in the power of death. It was that his faith was firm. He was ready to put off this tabernacle. He

passed away true to the faith he had professed and proclaimed. All the glory of a believing life was nothing to the glory of a believing death. And this is still true. God gets His highest glory, not from the works we do, the powers we manifest, the words we utter, but from the faith with which we trust, as we follow without murmuring, bear without repining, suffer the loss of health, goods, home, or friends without losing our confidence in Him. And as all this sinks into nothing before that one event which sums up all in one—the loss of every power, the loss of all we have, the loss of every friend, all swept away at a stroke by the cold hand of death—he who in that mysterious hour holds fast and firm his faith, leaps the last barrier without a fear, goes consciously forward to scenes unknown, undaunted and undismayed, does give to God a glory, before which all the achievements of life grow pale and dim. You may glorify God by a noble life; you will glorify Him even more by a believing death.

2. He is glorified by the evident triumph of life over death.

Death is swallowed up in victory. If what we see were all, it might be hard to say how death could bring glory to God. We fix our minds upon life, and often draw a veil over the rest. You cannot stand by a deathbed without feeling that a dark shadow has swept across the scene. But the darker the shadow,

the brighter the light. In the midst of all the signs that Death is bringing down the strong, when faculties fail beneath his paralysing touch, and the brain reels in the unequal strife, there is something that rises superior to them all, defies the mastery, and will not yield. In the very heat of the conflict there is heard at intervals a voice of peace, of confidence, of hope. There is something that death has not touched, and which, by the very firmness it maintains, proves that it can

> "The darkening universe defy,
> To quench its immortality,
> And shake its trust in God."

Tell me, then, can this be death? No, it is not death, but life over which death has no power, and in the possession of which the second death shall have no power at all. And, great as the glory rendered to God by the consecration of all these mortal powers to Him, He gets far greater glory from this triumph of life over death. And the noblest end of our life is by such a death to glorify God.

3. God is glorified, again, by the results which follow such a death.

We may well be desirous to glorify God by a faithful and useful life; but it is even more important that we should give unwavering proof of our faith when we are passing away. As a night of frost may nip and destroy the blossom and the early fruit of weeks of sunshine, so a death of unbelief would sweep the fruits

of a long life away. All the powers and labours of Peter and Paul would have availed little if they had recanted before they died. Their works live after them, not merely because of their earnest lives, but because of their faithful deaths. Judas had preached, and Demas had done much; but all the purpose they have ever served has been to stand as beacons, warning from the rocks and shoals of worldliness and treachery.

A Christian death, when not preceded by a useful life, may indeed do no more than magnify the grace of God at the eleventh hour. But a faithful death following a faithful life works on and round about in ever-widening circles through other hearts, with results that keep the saying true, "he slew (and saved) more by his death than by his life." A parent's death has made many a child a more earnest worker, and led many to decide for Christ. And while the richest fruit of earth is ripe when a believer dies, that very death will often burst the shell that held the ripened seed, and scatter promises of richer harvests than would ever have been reaped through his life alone. And by these fruits death glorifies God.

4. But He is still further glorified by the higher life to which death leads the way.

The process of death is the essential forerunner of a higher life. The seed is not quickened except it die. The blossom perishes that the fruit may be

formed. All nature is full of lessons of the same kind. The caterpillar dies, that from the chrysalis, in which, as in a coffin, it lies in seeming death, there may rise the moth with wings to cleave the upper air. And such is our transition. The decaying body is not the decaying man.

> "The soul, undrest from its mortal vest
> Steps in its car of heavenly fire,
> And proves how bright are the realms of light,
> Bursting at once upon the sight."

How, then, does this glorify God? Does the departure of a Peter or a Paul bring full glory to God through his passing hence to spend eternity in inactive repose? This was once the common thought. Surely not many hold it now. This is not God's mode. The seed is transformed into higher activity. The worm is equipped with wings for nobler purposes. And man is no exception to the rule. We are training here for nobler service there. As the Saviour endured the cross for the joy set before Him—the joy of preparing a place for His people, and preparing them for their place, the joy of destroying sin and saving souls—so does He promise that His faithful followers shall enter the joy of their Lord. And there they are, before the Lord, serving Him day and night in His temple. Activity in its noblest forms awaits the believer there. And this is death. God takes His ripe ones to serve Him in the upper sphere. We know not the law by which He selects, but we are

sure of the fact. And could we catch one strain of the new song, or one glimpse of the new service, we should see at once how their deaths have glorified God. From this, then, we may see—

III.—*The death most to be desired.*

There are some, indeed, who fix all their thoughts on glorifying God by a Christian life, so that death comes upon them as an unwelcome interruption. How different life would look if the highest end we kept before us were to be able to glorify God by death. Some, it is true, do, on the other hand, fix all their thoughts upon the way they shall die. Yet this again is wrong. The thought of dying happily should never supersede the thought of living faithfully; the one is essential to the other. The harvest needs all the summer; and God is glorified but little in death, when He has not been glorified in life before.

What, then, is the death we should desire? *Not a martyr's death.* The thought sometimes rises: If even now I could die the death of a Paul or Peter, a Latimer or Ridley, a Williams or Pattison, and lay down my life for Christ as they did, I might glorify God. There is no need for this. A martyr's death is still possible, if only, like them, we have crucified the flesh, or taken up our cross for Christ. The times demand no outward martyrdom. But the inward martyrdom, which is possible still, is that which glorifies God—the spirit that says, whether living or dying, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Not necessarily a triumphant death.—There are times when God grants this, and with all the ecstasy of victory already gained, the Christian is ready to exclaim, "I have fought a good fight, and, full of triumph, anticipate the crown." Yet this is the exception rather than the rule. Now and then we meet with Christians whose deaths are indeed happy, full of rapturous joy, who can say from the heart, even before they pass away,

> "Lend, lend your wings, I mount, I fly;
> O grave, where is thy victory?
> O death, where is thy sting?"

But far more often the sun sets in clouds, glorified indeed by the glorious hope, the radiance of heaven, but clouds notwithstanding. Sometimes the conflict continues till the very end, and there is hardly time for the shout of victory on this side the grave. At times the growing weakness, coupled with acutest pain, renders it hardly possible for the dying Christian to have more than *peace*. This is promised and will be given, and more need never be desired. No death, however happy, however triumphant, can give to God more glory than the death of one who is able to say—

> "Father, we trust and we lie still,
> Leave all things to Thy holy will,
> And so find perfect peace."

Such was indeed the death of our dear friend whose loss we mourn to-day. In all his Christian life he had been ripening for the early harvest. And with faith

unshaken in the Lord he loved, and hope brightening as the end drew near, he was enabled to give unwavering testimony, and glorify God by his perfect peace.

And this is the death that we should desire, and for which we may prepare. All else we may calmly leave in the hands of Him who does all things well. Let us seek daily so to live (laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation for the time to come, and laying hold on eternal life), that a Christian death will only come as a confirmation of a faithful Christian life. Let our faith gain strength by our close communion with our Lord, and be ever "faith that works by love." Let us give clear testimony that "we know whom we have believed." Let us leave behind the savour of a holy life, ended by a calm and trustful death, and the single work of earth will be changed into the double work of our memory on earth, where "our works live after us," and of our spirits in heaven, where we "rest from our labours, and our works do follow us." Thus indeed shall we be able, even by our death, to glorify God.

ETERNAL LIFE IN JESUS.

"*Your life is hid with Christ in God.*"—COL. iii. 3.

THE apostle Paul is very fond of tracing a resemblance between the career of Christ and that of every Christian. So close, in his opinion, is the union that exists between the believer and his Lord, that the facts of Christ's life and history are reproduced in the lives of His followers, and we all pass through the experience of our Lord. Did He die? We are dead with Christ. Was He buried? We are buried with Him by baptism. Did He rise again? We also rise to newness of life. We are risen with Christ. Has He ascended to heaven? We also sit with Him in heavenly places. Is He reigning upon His throne? We shall reign in life by Jesus Christ, and sit with Him upon His throne. Will He return? Them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him, and we that are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord.

His object in drawing this parallel is not to deal in figures merely, or to launch us into mysticism, but to make every one feel as he himself felt, that faith in Christ is followed by the closest union between the

believer and Christ; that this union is indissoluble and eternal; and that it binds us so inseparably to Him that what He was we are, what He passed through we are actually passing through now, and what He is we shall also be. We may be unable to scale, even in imagination, the lofty height to which He has risen, or picture the glory in which He dwells, but we ourselves shall climb that height, and all the glory will be seen in us; for we too are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

And this is the fact to which he here appeals. The Colossians were apparently becoming dissatisfied with what Christianity had done for them. This had rendered them a very easy prey to men who had tried to beguile them with a new style of spiritism. Under the pretence of opening up to them a new world, and bringing them within reach of higher forms of wisdom, they had persuaded them to try a new kind of religion, to worship angels, and intrude into things that had not been seen. And it is this delusion that Paul combats here. "Let no man beguile you." "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." Ye are complete in Christ; and if your life is a hidden life, "ye are dead (with Christ), and your life is hid with Christ in God." But it will not be hidden for ever; for "when He who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

The subject of our text, then, is that the special

endowment of the Christian is LIFE, a hidden life, but a life hid with Christ, and hid in God.

I.—*The Christian's great distinction is that he is in possession of* LIFE.

Your life. You must have observed the constancy with which the word "life" is used throughout the Old Testament and New. God claims it as His special attribute: "As I live, saith the Lord." Christ affirms that He also has it: "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He also given to the Son to have life in Himself." The apostles speak of it as His great distinction: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." And they also hold it up as inseparably connected with His great purpose in coming into the world. "He hath brought life and immortality to light." "He giveth life to the world." And this is set forth as the real glory of our present position, the peculiar possession of those who believe in Jesus. "He that hath the Son hath life." "Believing, ye have life through His name."

Now, the question is a very natural and a very important one: How are we to explain this use of the word "life," as in itself a sufficient description of the gift which Christ bestows upon His followers? What is this life which is possessed by them alone?

1. We might say that Paul uses the word to describe the greatness of this gift.

Life is the greatest as well as the most mysterious thing in all the universe. It is indeed familiar enough. We see it everywhere ; and we have it in ourselves. Yet how few of us ever stop for a moment to consider the might and marvel of this one thing we call life ! If some new discovery is made, some secret of Nature brought to light, or some fresh example seen of man's inventive genius or power, we are at once interested, excited, or amazed. But here, at constant work all round and close at hand, we have the mightiest power in the universe, producing in endless variety the most wondrous phenomena of all. The forces of chemistry that have produced the diamond, the ruby, or the pearl, or poured into the earth's large veins the iron, the silver, and the gold, are nothing to this. It is life which, with such constant profusion, is ever covering the earth with flowers of even greater beauty than the emerald or ruby, and our fields with golden harvests of far higher worth than the treasures of the mine. It is life that gives to every bird its plumage and its song, to the bee and ant their instinct, and to the dog and horse their intelligence and their superior powers. It is life, again, that brings forth in man not only his "far nobler shape, erect and tall, godlike erect," but his still higher power of sense and intellect, by which he scales the heavens, explores the deep recesses of the earth, wrests from Nature her secrets, and climbs by Nature's ladder up to Nature's God. Yes, it is life that gives to angelic hosts their still greater powers of body

and of mind, fitting all for higher service, and enabling seraphim and cherubim to stand close around the throne. And we may go higher still and say that life is the great attribute of God Himself. He is the living God, and from Him as from an eternal spring flow all those streams of life which thus cover the universe that He has made. What wonder, then, that when the apostle wished to express in one word the magnitude, of the blessing with which the Christian is endowed, he could find no word more fitting than the simple word *life;* and the Saviour Himself could find no brighter promise with which to fire the Christian's zeal, and give firmness to his faith, than the assurance, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of LIFE."

2. But we may go further, and say that the word life is used as the distinctive characteristic of a Christian man.

Although all these have life, the life of one differs immensely from that of every other. Everything lives in a world of its own. Within that world it has life; to the whole world beyond it is lifeless or dead. And it is this opening of a wider world, in which the Christian lives and moves, that makes him living while other men are dead. And it is also the fact that this is the highest, most real, and most lasting world of all—the only world that can be called eternal—that makes him the possessor of the truest life, eternal life—the

very crown of life. What is it, then, in which he lives while other men are dead?

(1.) The first thing is his real faith in Christ, and in things unseen and eternal.

"Faith is the evidence (the strong conviction) of things not seen." We all believe in what we see. And although there are times when most men talk as if they believed in Christ, in God, and the world to come —the spirit world; yet he alone has true faith in these who has gained that faith through faith in Christ. There are few harder lessons to learn than how to believe in things unseen, to be as firmly persuaded of the existence of things we do not see as of things we do, and how to give to things unseen an influence as real and great as to things the hand can handle and the eye behold. Men may not throw off the universal instinct which says there is another world than this. But they either let it fade away into a fable or myth, or fill it with the false pictures and vain delusions of their own imaginations. And in either case the world in which they believe is not the true one. Christ alone has brought this world unseen to light.

> "From heaven He came, of heaven He spoke,
> To heaven He led His followers' way;
> Dark clouds of gloomy night He broke,
> Unveiling an eternal day."

In Him, and in that world, the Christian believes, and that belief is LIFE.

(2.) The second factor in this true life is its sympathy. Everything lives in its own world. With that world it has perfect sympathy, but to all beyond it is unsympathetic or dead. The limits of sympathy are the limits of life. You take a plant. It is open to all the influences of light, and moisture, and air. Beneath their influence it grows, puts forth its leaves, and bears the loveliest flowers and sweetest fruits. But it can do no more. It has no eye for its own beauty, is regaled by none of its own sweet odours, and cannot taste its own fruits. If you speak to it, it hears no sound. Full of sympathy with the world of light, to the world of sound and the whole world of sense it is lifeless, dead. It is not so with the animal. It has keen eyes and ears. It sees your form and listens to your voice. It responds to your call, and will go at your bidding. But it also has its own world. You may tell it your most touching tale, speak to it of your inmost thoughts, but none of them will receive the smallest response, or awaken sympathy within its brain. Full of sympathy with its own world of sense, to all the world of mind it is lifeless or dead. How different is it when you take a child. It reflects your feelings with sympathy, comprehends your words, and is moved to joy or sorrow by the tales you tell. And though it may not yet understand the whole, it is not that it lives in another world, but that it has not grown up, any more than we ourselves have done, to the full range of the world in which it lives. Give it time, and

it will grow; for with this world it has full sympathy, and in this world it lives. But here we come to the most striking contrast. You take a worldly man, and find at once the want of sympathy between him and the Christian man. "God is not in all his thoughts," and the Christian's delight in God he cannot comprehend. Christ is to him a name, and nothing more; and it is a mystery insoluble to him how He can ever be to you "the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." The Bible is a book in which he finds nothing to learn, and it puzzles him to know how you can find treasures of truest wisdom there. Death is to him only an inevitable event of the darkest and saddest kind; and how you can say you have no fear, and sometimes see no gloom, and have even a desire to depart, is beyond the understanding of any worldly-minded man. There is a world from which he is shut out—a world unseen; a world of peace and joy and hope; a world heavenly and Divine. The Christian is within it, and has truest sympathy with all that is there. To all that world others may be dead; but his sympathy is LIFE.

3. There is more than sympathy—there is responsive growth.

Wherever there is real life, with favouring conditions, there is sure to be growth. The flower opens beneath the sunlight, which paints it as it expands. The body grows in vigour, size, and form, under all the influences

of the world in which it lives. And through the power of the world of thought the mind of any man must grow. And here again the contrast appears. There are men who spend all their days in the midst of "the powers of the world to come," and end just as they began. The light that streams from Christ and floods this world with heavenly day, the doctrine that drops as the rain, and the speech that distils as the dew, have produced no change in them. The Saviour's call they never hear, and the Spirit's breath they never feel. To this whole world of truth and light and heavenly law they are cold and hard and dead. It is not so with the Christian. Under the power of that world he becomes a new creation. His very nature is transformed. He grows in grace and wisdom. New forms of character come to light. New fruit is borne. The influence of heaven transfigures earth. He grows up in Christ; and that growth is life.

4. And the last, if not the highest, feature in this life is its endless duration.

There is nothing more familiar than death. What is there on earth over which it has not irresistible power? It touches the body, and the strong man is brought low. The lips lose their language, the hand forgets its cunning, and the eye sees no more. It touches the brain, and from the highest intellect memory and reason vanish away. The brightness of that light goes out in darkness, never perhaps to kindle

again. But there is something beyond its power. It cannot paralyse a Christian's faith, lay its cold hand upon a Christian's love, or rob a Christian of his hope of heaven. The house falls, but the servant only removes to his Father's home on high. The outer tabernacle is removed, but this only brings out in all its brightness the glory of the shrine within.

"The soul, undressed
From its mortal vest,
Steps in its car of heavenly fire,
And proves how bright
Are the worlds of light,
Bursting at once upon the sight."

And this is life—the crown of life.

II.—*The hidden nature of the Christian life.*

"Your life is hid." A thing is hidden only when it cannot be seen. Some, overlooking this, have taken the passage to mean nothing more than "laid up," deposited, kept in safety. But there is no reason whatever for adopting any other than the literal meaning of the words.

Yet in what sense is the Christian life a hidden life? Does Paul simply reason that from its very nature it is invisible—a life that cannot be seen by any human eye? This is true of all life. You may see living things, but life you can never see. Take any living object and dissect it; you may lay bare muscle, bone, and nerve, but with all your anatomy, you will never bring the life to view. All life is in this sense hidden

and the Christian's life is no exception to the universal rule. Does he, then, really mean that it differs from other life in this respect—that you do not even see the fruit of it, the effect of its existence, the proofs that it is there? There seem to be many who think so, and flatter themselves that they may be in possession of true spiritual life, though neither they themselves, nor any one else, can see any outward and visible sign. But this life ought to be seen; yea, if it really be there it must be seen. A life so hidden that it bears no fruit, produces no effect, is no life at all. Latent life is death. It is not in this sense that our life is hid·

1. The Christian's life is a hidden life, because men generally have not eyes to discover its real nature.

It is not absolutely invisible, for it is seen clearly enough by God and by the church, though the world may not see it. In this way Christ Himself was hidden through all His earthly career. Men saw Him clearly enough, His outward form, His sad and loving face. But the world knew Him not. The real Christ few saw. They saw only an ordinary man. His life was hid. Even His own disciples could not always see Him. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" But now and then they caught some glimpses of that hidden life. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." There is nothing strange in this. Whether a thing is hidden or not,

depends not only on what it is, but on what eyes men have. How often do you hear men say, "I see no beauty in it"? There is beauty enough, but they have no eyes ; and so the beauty is hid. Thus men often read the finest poems that Tennyson has written, or look with wondering eyes at the grandest paintings Turner ever produced, and see nothing. The paper and type are visible enough in the one, and the canvas and colour in the other. They have no eyes for anything beside, and all the deeper reasoning and truest beauty of both poet and painter are hidden from their view. And thus, because the Christian life effects no change in outward look or social standing, to those who have no eyes for the beauties of a holy character, and the true glory of a life of godliness, there is nothing to see in a Christian man that could win their admiration or attract their notice ; for His life, to them at least, is hid.

2. It may be called a hidden life, because its source and sustenance are both unseen.

The source and sustenance of this earthly life are visible enough. The body lives and grows on things that we can see and taste and handle. And even the mind derives its food from what we see and hear. But the Christian can always say, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." The food that nourishes the soul is angel's food, drawn down like manna from the skies. It is only in closest communion with Christ

that the life of the Christian really thrives. He by His Spirit gave us life, and by that Spirit He sustains it still. And as the light of heaven that streams down from the visible sun draws up the flower whose beauty reflects the light on which it feeds; so does the heavenly light that pours down from the Sun of Righteousness draw up the life within towards its eternal source, and paint upon the Christian's heart the image of his Lord. But as these streams of life and light are all unseen, the life is hid.

3. It is hid, because its full glory has never yet been seen.

All life is hidden for a time.

You take up an acorn, and can easily distinguish the living from the dead. But in that acorn what do you really see? Within that acorn there is all the making of a perfect oak. Can you see it? No. Why not? for it is really there. The spreading oak with all its beauty is within that acorn now. Yet you cannot see it, for its life is hid. And when you look upon an infant, lying helpless in its cradle, and stretching out its arms or fingers to feel for this outside world, how little do you ever see of the real life within! There lies the poet, there the statesman, there the philosopher of the coming age. They are all there; the philosopher's brain in the one, the poet's in another. Yet you cannot see it, for though the life is there, the life is hid. And thus when Christ was here, His life was

hid. Not in the cradle or the workshop only, but through all His life, beneath that lowly form, there were hidden treasures of "power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory and blessing," which were only seen in part on earth, and never came forth in all perfection till He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And thus is the life of the Christian hidden still. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared." The visions of Paul and John reveal but a small part of the full glory of the life beyond. The finest picture that was ever drawn by poet, painter, or inspired sage can tell us but little of the eternal glory that is to be revealed.

"We speak of the realms of the blest,
That country so bright and so fair;
And oft are its glories expressed,
But what must it be to be there?"

Yet all that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" is here, within the very humblest of the followers of Christ. Let that life grow; it must grow up to all the glory of the saints in light. And if now it doth not yet appear what we shall be, it is not that the life is not within, but that the life is hid.

III.—*These words express the perfect safety of the Christian life.*

It is hid in God. The safety of anything depends upon where it is, in what it is rooted, or by what it is sustained. It matters not how the vessel is moored

if the rock itself is crumbling, or the moorings can be washed away. Nor in what soil the tree is rooted, if the floods will sweep the very soil before them. Nor in what iron safe your treasures are locked up, if thieves can break through and steal. Your investments may be as safe as in a bank, but if the bank be insolvent, the safety is gone. Here, then, is the safety of the Christian life—it is hid in God. Were it only hid in ourselves—our feelings, our resolutions, our deeds, or our character—it would be truly rooted in the sand. But hid in God we have nothing to fear. The storms that sweep all else before them can never touch this life. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." Nothing can ever endanger the life that is hid in God.

IV.—*The words also indicate the certain glory of the Christian life.*

"It is hid with Christ." Paul here returns to his one fixed thought, the close association of Christ and the Christian. It may be hidden; and so was His. Go and follow Him from Nazareth to Calvary. Look at that Man of sorrows, the Man who had not where to lay His head, the despised Nazarene. Now look up, if you can bear the dazzling light, and see the glorified One at the right hand of the Majesty on high. They are the very same, and the path which led from

Calvary to that throne on high is the pathway that all will tread whose life is hid with Christ in God. And up through the highest ranks of earthly potentates and powers, past all the many grades of angelic hosts above, even to the throne of Christ Himself, will every Christian wend his way. The believer cannot be severed from his Lord. "Where I am, there shall ye be also." Joint-heirs with Christ, we share the inheritance with Him. What He is we shall be; what He has we shall possess. We shall sit with Him upon His throne. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And when He who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory."

But have you all this life? You may have it. Christ waits to give eternal life. And whosoever believeth in Him will never perish, but have everlasting life. Why, then, do you not possess it? Have you never sought it? or have you put it from you? You know not what you do. All other life will end in death—the first or second death. The brightest light will be extinguished in that outer darkness, to which you are going if you are rejecting Christ. The dark shades of eternal night will wrap in deepest gloom all those who have not life in Him. And the cold hand of death will soon be laid on all that you can now call your own. Here is life which death cannot touch, light that can never be turned into darkness, and hope that cannot give place to despair. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light."

And with His light of life you will pass without fear through all the darkness of death, to the home of your Saviour and the glory of your God.

"Jesus is gone before us,
Those mansions to prepare;
Soon shall we share His glories,
And sing His praises there.
The prospect, oh, how cheering!
We hail the happy day,
And long for His appearing
To bear our souls away."

CHRIST'S PEACE THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION.

"*Peace I leave with you: My peace I give unto you.*"
JOHN xiv. 27.

THESE words are generally regarded as Christ's farewell to His disciples. It is true that they all go with Him as far as Gethsemane, and He still keeps them spell-bound by His conversation as they walk along the road. But they are breaking up from the upper room, and this is truly the parting scene. There will be no saying farewell in the garden—no bidding "good-bye" on the cross. And so, even here, as they leave the room where the last supper was held, the Saviour speaks His parting words of *peace*.

It is from the words themselves that we infer that it was meant as a parting salutation. The common phrase, both in meeting and parting, was, "*Peace* be with you." The world wished it always, and wished it to every one; and Christ still keeps to the old familiar words.

But He varies them, although He adopts them. He shows with all clearness that with Him it is no empty form of words; no wish for what He does not

Himself possess, like our own "good-bye," "God be with you," which is so carelessly uttered by those who have no desire to have God with themselves; nor an apparent gift of what He really cannot confer, like the common Oriental "Salaam." "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you." These words would come with peculiar emphasis to those who had lived with Him, and would be well remembered after He was gone. His mother would recall the day when with alarmed and anxious heart she sought Him sorrowing for three whole days; and with what Divine composure and celestial *peace* upon His face He answered when they found Him, "How was it that ye sought me?" Peter and James and John would recall their ascent of the Mount, and how, in the midst of that excellent glory, when Moses and Elijah talked of His death, and they fell terrified to the earth, He talked with calm and peaceful countenance till He was transfigured before them. They would all remember that stormy sail across the lake, when they were at their wits' end, how He woke, as from an infant's slumber, and spreading the serenity of His own nature over the very elements, said, "Peace, be still," and there was a great calm. Most of all would Peter and John recall that sad but peaceful face as it appeared in the high priest's court and Pilate's judgment hall. They all forsook Him and fled; full of dismay, they ran hither and thither, like birds scattered by a storm—but in Him there was perfect peace.

That peace He gives them now and leaves with them. The contrast which He here draws between His own peace and that of the world has been differently explained. Some think that the words mean, "What I now give is the very opposite of what will be given by the world. In the world ye shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace." Others suppose that the meaning is rather, "The peace I give is far different from the world's. The world gives in words and apparent wishes; I give in reality. The world gives outwardly and fleetingly; I give within, and for ever. The peace I give is true and real; and, what is more, it is my own: *My* peace I give." We may take it in either sense, for both are true. But I prefer the latter: I shall not give you peace as understood by the world, or what all the world calls peace. I shall not indeed revoke My words, "Through much tribulation ye must enter the kingdom;" nor recall what I said, "I am not come to send peace on earth," yet I still give you peace, true peace, *My* peace; even though "not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

1.—*The peace possessed.*

We can well imagine that there was nothing which struck the followers of Christ, who were with Him every day, more than His invariable possession of the truest peace. When others were troubled, on either His account or their own, He showed no sign of

trouble or distress. When they were full of anxiety or alarm, He was calm, composed, and apparently without a fear. When they saw before them nothing but danger, persecution, and death, and would gladly have turned back, He never wished to turn, but walked on with the same calm, stedfast step with which He would have walked to the house of Lazarus or His own mother's home. Whence arose this peace? Certainly not from any of the outward circumstances of His life. For the three years of His public ministry, His life was one scene of constant trouble. Not only were His personal privations often great, so that He was truly "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," hungering, thirsting, and not having where to lay His head, but all the circumstances of His ministry were the very last that were likely to give Him peace. Sickening at the sight of human misery and sin, He went about doing good, only to awaken indignation and scorn. Knowing that He was charged with a Divine message of truth and love, which would spread the brightest light through all the gloom that overspread the earth, He delivered it amidst revilings, opposition, and disdain. With the firm intention to establish a Church that should abide and spread till all the families of the earth were blessed, every attempt was made to prevent His laying even the first foundation. He gathered a company of followers, but there was little to give Him peace even with them; for some went away, one denied, one betrayed. He

could not commit Himself to them; for if ever He did communicate a little more to them than He had ventured to tell to others, they were alarmed at the revelation, and did not understand. There was nothing outward to give any one peace. The surroundings were all full of difficulty, disappointment, and danger; the prospect was gloomy; and, so far as could be *seen*, all the outlook was dark indeed.

Yet HE had peace! Through all that life there was no sign of anxiety, no evidence of fear, no appearance of disturbance in Him; and to bear all that unmoved, to have peace when all around were thus disturbed, was peace indeed. Deep in His heart there must have been some hidden well-spring which they had not found; and from some everlasting source there must have come an unfailing supply which they had not yet discovered.

What, then, was His peace? It was the *peace of strongest confidence.* All the trembling of others arose from uncertainty, misgiving, or fear. There was none of this in Him. He had not expected a sunny path, a hearty welcome, or a prosperous career; and when He found the opposite it never touched the groundwork of His strong faith; so that He could meet it all with confidence unshaken, and with peace that nothing could disturb.

It was the *peace of submission.* The feelings of His nature were just as keen as ours, and His sufferings as acute as those of other men; but He had not

come to seek enjoyment, or do His best to escape from pain. He had come to do His Father's will, finish the work He gave Him to do, drink the cup He might give Him, and say, "Thy will be done." And to Him the intensest pain and deepest sorrows were more than balanced by the satisfaction and delight of being able to say, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" and of knowing that He was doing His Father's will—and that was peace.

It was the peace of *brightest hope*. He could see already that others were blessed by His life ; and He could look forward to the time when His sorrows should bring to countless crowds eternal joy. And with the firm assurance that His death would be to them the fountain of everlasting life, He forgot Himself in the prospect of others, and still preserved His peace.

It was the peace *of communion with the Father*. Although He sought the friendship of others, and cultivated their affection, He was never dependent upon either ; and when they failed Him, as they too often did, He could withdraw to the solitude of some mountain top, and there, alone with His Father, recruit His drooping strength, and in that fellowship at once replenish His heart with peace. All the events of the day would be rehearsed and reviewed ; all the prospects of the morrow anticipated ; failing strength of body or soul were at once restored; and,

with new assurance that He and the Father were one, He would come down refreshed, and so lifted above the world that He was able to walk upon the stormiest sea of this world's opposition, not only untroubled by its waves, but able to scatter His own peace abroad, and to lull them by His "Peace, be still." This was His peace, so deep that the storms which swept across the surface could never disturb it; so truly within Himself that outward changes were hardly felt as He passed amidst them all; and with its source so high above the world that nothing could ever stop its flow or diminish its supply. It was truly "the peace of God which passeth understanding."

II.—*The peace needed.*

The disciples had reached that point when they could realise the meaning of the words of Christ, "Through much tribulation ye must enter the kingdom." And the further they went the more did the clouds appear to blacken, till there were unmistakable threatenings of a gathering storm. The words of Christ had troubled their hearts; and they were overwhelmed with anguish at the prospect of His crucifixion. And what else could they expect for themselves? "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household." "If they persecute Me, they will also persecute you." With words like these had Christ prepared them for what was coming. The storm

soon burst upon them. The Jewish authorities were paralysed for a moment by the resurrection of Jesus; but they soon recovered themselves. The disciples were imprisoned, persecuted, and slain. In all lands they were opposed. Their successes were snatched away, and their most prosperous Churches scattered. Errors crept in under their very eyes, and their warmest supporters turned against them. Chased from place to place, they were indeed partakers of their Saviour's sufferings, and died daily like their Lord. In all their work there was no doubt much to encourage—nay, we now see, much to reward; but there were few, if any, moments of outward peace to them. From the very hour when their Lord was taken from them till they ended their lives by a martyr's death, there was no outward rest. Persecuted, opposed, forsaken, "without were fightings, and within were fears." Every messenger brought news of the desertion of one, the fall of another, and the perversion of a third. The care of all the Churches was enough to break them down: and when they died the streaks of the morning were almost all swallowed up in the shades of night again. In their own lives, in their Churches, and in their work, there was no peace without, and great therefore must have been their need of the peace of Christ within.

This has not always been the case. There have been times when the lines have fallen in pleasant places, and the prosperity of the Church has been

undoubted ; but, like bright weather, it has not lasted long. There have been but few ages in the history of the Church when it has not had its peace disturbed now by opposition, now by error, and now by backsliding and sin. And although there can be no comparison between our times and those of the earliest ages, it is not even now all peace. We have not the opposition of the world, the laws of states, the persecution of enemies to confront us : so that outwardly there is peace. But it is not all quiet and undisturbed. Sometimes in our homes the calm of years is broken, troubles little expected burst like a thunderstorm in a clear sky upon a Christian hearth and home, and sweep all peace away. Sometimes in our business the calm steady prosperity of years is, through calamity after calamity, brought to an end. Sometimes in our Christian work a long career of usefulness is suddenly checked. A Church that has been blessed with unusual success is stunned by some unexpected blow. All seems to reel around us. The enemy rushes in like a flood. The very foundations of the earth seem out of course. All faith is gone. We are ready to say in our haste, All men are liars ; and in our utter perplexity are ready to despair.

These trials may not yet have come to you. But in some form they are certain to come. We are still partakers of our Lord's troubles and shall be made to feel it. And when they come, be sure of this, one thing alone can carry us through : the Lord's own peace.

III.—*The peace promised and bestowed.*

"My peace I give unto you." The Saviour looks round upon His disciples, and sees them overwhelmed with sorrow and anxiety. But He does not give them the slightest promise that these can possibly be averted or removed. He will have to drink His cup; and they must drink theirs too. He might point them forward to the time when He would have ascended; but even then He could not promise that the opposition would terminate and the tribulation cease; for when He chooses another apostle, the very first thing He shows him is how much he must suffer. But if He cannot promise exemption, He can promise what is even better: that they shall have His peace.

Is there any evidence that they did receive it? Is there not indeed the strongest proof? Look at Gethsemane and the judgment hall. You find them all forsaking Him in their fear, and Peter, in spite of his declaration, denying that he knows Him. But look only fifty days afterwards, when the promise is fulfilled; and all is changed. They who met with doors bolted and barred, meet in a place so public that a crowd of three thousand can listen to Peter's words. Peter and John are arrested and brought up for judgment, but now, instead of oaths and impassioned denials, we hear the calm, peaceful words: "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. We cannot but speak

the things that we have seen and heard." There is Christ's peace *there*. Stephen is surrounded by a wild and sanguinary crowd, all armed with stones to crush him to the earth, and thirsting for his blood. But there are no lines of fear upon his countenance. His face still bears its angelic beauty, and with calm bright eye he looks up where Jesus stands, sees his Lord waiting to receive him, and with the peace of God yields up his life in the one simple prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Paul is soon involved in the depth of his predicted sufferings. But his peace is never destroyed. At Philippi, in the depth of midnight, sweet strains of music are heard from the darkest dungeon in that loathsome prison-house. It is the peaceful praise of two Christian captives in the stocks. At Cæsarea friends gather round to picture the dangers that await him, and entreat him not to go. But his heart knows no fear. "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." The peace of Christ was truly there.

And the Church has never been left altogether without it. There have been Elis trembling for the ark of God, and Uzzahs putting out their hand in fear that it was going to fall; but in the midst of the deepest troubles through which it has passed, and the fiercest storms that have raged about it, there have been true, faithful men of God who have never de-

spaired. In every age there have been Luthers and Latimers, who have not only held fast their confidence, but whose peace has deepened with the roaring of the waves. The more they have been forsaken of men, the closer has been their communion with God. And with strong hold of Him and of His promises, and hearts that could enter into the secret place of the Most High, although there has been everything without to agitate, threaten, and alarm, they have been guided into perfect peace.

And you, if strong in faith and brave of heart, have felt it too. And you may have it still. We have no promise of exemption from trouble, anguish, and adversity. The calm may end at any moment, and the sunshine give place to lowering heavens and the most pitiless storm. The troubles that are coming God only knows. But there is still the peace. Hope of constant outward calm is the most unwise that we can cherish. But the peace that is always calm is the best that any man can possibly desire. And that we can always obtain. Live near to Christ, and though He never give you power to walk upon the stormy billows, and hush the waves to rest, He will give you *His peace*, that no wave can alarm, and no floods overwhelm. Cherish His submission, and when the pain is sharpest, the cup most bitter, and the trouble hardest to bear, the thought that it is His will, and the delight to do His will, can still bring you truest peace. Remember that your way is His, your work

also His, and your cause His own, and you will then soon learn that you have nothing to fear. Your salvation, your success in His work, and the triumph of His cause—all these He has at heart. And He has all power in heaven and on earth. Hold fast this confidence, and *you must have peace.*

Some of you have not this peace. You fear, and have good reason to fear. Perhaps many of you through fear of death have been all your lifetime subject to bondage. You have the peace of the world —the peace of a fair and promising outside. You have health, a happy home, a prosperous business, good reputation, and have nothing, as you think, to desire. But you have no pledge that this will last; disease, losses, sorrow, death, any one of these may fall on you to-day, and in a moment your peace is gone. The world's peace can never be guaranteed, and cannot long continue. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." These are the words of Christ, and words that He is ready to repeat to you. Trust in Him; draw your truest joy and brightest hope from Him; let Him be your Saviour, your Guide; and amidst all the uncertainties of earth, all the trials of life, and all the gloom and mystery of death, He will give you His own perfect and everlasting peace.

But many of you have it already, and, if you would, might have much more. We are the only traitors who can ever expel the peace of God, when it comes to garrison and guard our hearts. Have faith in Him,

and He will give you peace. Not the peace of a soldier in barracks, but of a warrior on the battle-field, proud of his cause and certain of victory. Not the peace of a sailor in harbour, but the peace, calm and unmoved, of one sure that his vessel can weather the storm. That peace we ought to have, for His word is clear and His promises are sure. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Strong in this faith, I have nothing to fear. Changes unexpected must come, sorrows unlooked for gather their gloom, and troubles unseen for the moment obstruct my heavenward way; but come when and whence they will—

"In heavenly love abiding
No change my heart shall fear,
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here.

"The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?"

COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST;

OR, RITUALISM AND SPIRITISM JUDGED BY ST. PAUL.

"*Ye are complete in Him.*"—COL. ii. 10.

THE Churches of the apostles' days were not so perfect as is commonly supposed. They started with earnestness, strong faith, and self-denying zeal; but, to a great extent, they were soon drawn away from every one of these. Large numbers of the early Christians left their first love—had a name to live, but were dead—kept the form of godliness, but denied the power—and were even moved from the faith of the gospel. The pride and boast of the apostles were, that they were able to offer to every man a perfect gospel, the whole truth, and complete salvation. Their favourite theme was the fulness of Christ, and the unfathomable depths of wisdom, knowledge, and love that were to be found in Him. His riches were unsearchable, and His power infinite. But their followers did not always attain to this perfect confidence. Some of them, still clinging to their early trust in meritorious works, let go their faith for the ordi-

nances of Judaism, and the fasts and ceremonies of an outward law; while others, stimulated by a curiosity which the gospel failed to satisfy, attempted, by methods of their own, to "intrude into things which are not seen." The effect of both these movements was in one respect the same: they led away from Christ.

This was peculiarly the case with the Church at Colosse. That Church is supposed to have been founded by Epaphras, who visited Paul in his imprisonment at Rome. Epaphras had brought to Paul the gratifying intelligence that the Church, as a whole, still retained its faith in Jesus, and love to all the saints. But this did not hold good of all. There were certain disturbers of the Churches who had unsettled the minds of many of the believers, and shaken their faith in the sufficiency of Christ. Among the things which these new-comers affirmed, were the necessity for circumcision, the binding obligation to observe feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, and the virtue of fasts, as the true means of holiness. They also wrought upon the natural curiosity and love of mysticism, which were so common in that region, by pretending that they could obtain new revelations through the invocation of angels. All this, introduced as it was under the name of Christianity, had begun to make havoc in the Church, and there were, at any rate, some of its members who were in imminent danger of being "spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit after the rudiments of the world, and not

after Christ." The apostle Paul was troubled by the intelligence, and wrote at once to this Church in danger. Christ, he maintained, was all-sufficient. They could not get beyond Him, or rise above Him, though they might forsake Him. Their listening to these teachers was a sign of declining faith. If they followed them, they would soon cease to "hold the Head," and nothing could compensate for the loss they would sustain. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him."

Let us examine—

I.—*The fact which is here affirmed.*

"Ye are complete in Christ." These words are too often quoted as meaning nothing more than the imputation to the believer of the completeness of Christ, and the prospective perfection of all His disciples. But a careful reading of the whole chapter will show that the intention of the apostle is to give a direct denial to those false teachers who were attempting to persuade the Colossians that Christ and His gospel were not sufficient to ensure perfect safety or perfect sanctity, and that they themselves could procure, by means of angels, a superior revelation to that which the gospel of Christ had put into their hands. In the face of all such assertions, and in direct denial of all such claims, he boldly affirms that in Christ are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and we are "complete in Him."

What is the completeness we have in Christ? The field is a very wide one. We shall confine ourselves to the three things at which the Colossians were aiming, about which they had misgivings, and which Paul, therefore, had in his mind. They were beginning to question the sufficiency of Christ to give to those who believe complete safety, complete sanctity, and complete illumination. Paul affirms His sufficiency for all these; and hence our completeness in Christ.

1. In Christ we have complete security.

The longing for safety and for the assurance of safety is inherent in us all. "What must I do to be saved?" is the instinctive cry of all who are conscious of danger. The gospel meets that want, and with unfaltering confidence replies, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." But whilst this expresses the creed of the Church, it does not express the assurance of every Christian. The history of the Church is the history of constant additions made by the Church itself to the essential pre-requisites of salvation, as taught by the Lord. Enlarged confessions, additional articles, outward ordinances, rites, and ceremonies, confession and penance, are but a few of the things which have been introduced to increase the security of those who believe. And just because there is always some danger that even Christians should lose their perfect confidence, and try by other means to add to their safety, it is not a useless thing

to go now and then beneath the surface, and survey for ourselves the foundations of our faith. What is it, then, that makes our security complete?

(1) The completeness of Christ's atonement. Christ has not only atoned for sin, but atoned for all sin: not for the sins of one generation, but for the sins of all. "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Words could not add intensity to the assurance, and surely nothing can be needed to add to the fact. However crimson may be your sins, there is the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and they shall be as wool. However deep the stain may penetrate, the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. Bold, indeed, must any man be who can ever affirm that he can add to such an atonement, or that, without his absolution, the sin cannot be removed. And timid must he be who, with this fact before him, cannot look alone to Christ, and in the cross of Christ find perfect peace.

(2) The completeness of His power to save. We are saved by faith, but it is not faith that saves. The power that saves is the power of Christ, and it is His hand that delivers. We are safe, not because of the strength of our faith, but because of the power of our Saviour's arm. And if we have the feeblest faith, faith only as a grain of mustard seed, He is able to save to the uttermost, and none can pluck us out of

His hand. "All power is given to Me, in heaven and on earth." Omnipotence is engaged in saving all who believe. To that Omnipotence what mortal can add? From it who can take away?

(3) The completeness of His own guarantee. We are not left to draw our own conclusions, either from what He has done or what we have seen. We have His own express declaration: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation." "I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Could words be plainer, or guarantee more sure? What could make the foundation of our hopes more firm, or give us greater security than these facts and words contain? Surely the attempt to add can only diminish the safety of those who, because they believe in Christ, are already complete in Him.

2. In Christ we have the fullest provision for our perfect sanctity.

There is a great difference between perfect safety and perfect sanctity, and however men may admit our safety in Christ, it is just because they cannot see our sanctity, that they offer, with so much plausibility, a more excellent way. We admit without reserve the defects of the Church, and the grievous failings of even Christian men. The Church is not what it might be, nor what it ought to be. The sufficiency of Christ to give strength of principle,

purity of feeling, uprightness of character, is not shown as it ought to be by those who believe. But no conclusion could be more erroneous than that we must, therefore, give up our faith and look elsewhere. If your faith fail, it is from the falseness of your faith, not from the insufficiency of Christ. No remedy for sin can be more potent than this, and no sanctifying power be found except in Him. Not only can He destroy the power of sin, so that it shall have no more dominion over us; but to the very roots can that power go—take away the love of sinning and cleanse from all sin. Perfect we are not; but there are spirits of just men made perfect, and that perfection they derived from Christ. Angelic spirits are not purer than they. And the power that lifted them so high is not exhausted. Christ wants no human help to supplement His failing power. Still is He mighty to save, and that from all sin. Heaven is not too pure for Him to make us meet to enter it, nor His throne too holy for Him to enable us to grace it. "To Him that overcometh will I give to sit down upon My throne." "He will present you faultless before the presence of His glory." Can anything increase this power, or can you need to go elsewhere for holiness of any kind, when you are thus complete in Christ?

3. In Christ we have a perfect revelation.

We have no more perfect knowledge than perfect

holiness. The diversities, controversies, and errors of the Churches have often been a byword in the world. We admit all this, but are we, therefore, to say that the fault is in the defective revelation, and not rather in ourselves? Are we to leave the Bible because we fail to interpret it, and pronounce it insufficient because our faculties are defective? The question is not whether we can see clearly, but whether the sun is shining brightly; not whether we are infallible, but whether in the treasure-house of Christ we can find all the truth. And to this it is that the apostle gives so clear and confident a reply. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "And ye are complete in Him."

First, then, we have in Christ *the only complete revelation of God.* "The heavens declare His glory; the firmament showeth His handiwork;" but Christ alone has shown God, or could ever say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." To this revelation no words could add; for in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead, and God was manifest in Him. Then, again, we have in Christ *a complete revelation of the way to God.* "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The shorter ways that men have opened have never reached to God. The helps that they have devised have always hindered in the end. In this clear path all men can walk; the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein; and we, pointing to Christ, may

always say, "Behold the way to God." And, lastly, we have in Christ *a complete revelation of immortality and heaven.* "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," but God hath revealed them to us. Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light. All that we could understand He has made plainly known. There are depths and heights that cannot be shown till we have passed within the veil. Paul, when caught up, heard words, but when he came down to the atmosphere of earth they could not be uttered. And when Lazarus returned, if his own sisters asked him, "Where wast thou, brother, those four days?" we are sure he could not tell. The very pretence of speaking the unspeakable and showing the unseen is its own condemnation. No revelation has ever surpassed the revelation that Christ has given us here. The eye could see no more of the realities of heaven, whatever picture might pass before it; spirits of air could tell us no more, with whatever eloquence they might discourse. The revelation is perfect; science can add no new discoveries, and modern inspiration supply no defects. Thus all is complete: a perfect Christ, a complete atonement, a fountain of holiness, and all the truth. "And we are complete in Him."

II.—*The twofold error by which this fact had been obscured.*

If we carefully read this letter to the Colossian Church, we shall find that under the name of Chris-

tianity two very different movements were going on in the Church, which were altogether opposed to the teaching of Paul, and may fairly be classed under the modern names of Ritualism and Spiritism. On the one hand, it was plainly affirmed that, however important it might be to have faith in Christ, this alone could never be enough to ensure salvation. Circumcision was still essential; "meats and drinks" were questions of vital importance; "holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths" must be rigidly observed, and true holiness could only be promoted by abstinence and fasts: "touch not, taste not, handle not" (vers. 11, 16, 21). These were the things which this new school had taught as things of vital importance, if not even more essential than faith. On the other hand, a very different movement was making its way in the Church. The craving for light had been satisfied for a time by the revelations and truths of the gospel. The preaching of Christ had been like a fountain to a thirsty traveller, so thoroughly had it met their wants and satisfied their longings. But new teachers had arisen now, whose boast was that they had left Christianity behind. They had found out the way to obtain new revelations, and discover still further truth. Angels came at their call and revealed the secrets of the unseen world. They had but to invoke (*Angl.* worship) angelic beings, and they opened a world that Christ had left closed, and so enabled them to intrude into things not seen (ver. 18). We are not told

whether these new teachers formed two schools or only one; nor does it really matter. It is enough to know that while the one sought, by means of ritualism, to increase the safety of the believer in Christ, the other pretended, by means of spiritualism, to add to the revelation that Christ had already made. The one point of agreement was unbelief in the sufficiency of the gospel, and the completeness of the believer *in Christ*. This, then, is the twofold evil with which Paul here sets himself to deal, and against which he so earnestly bids the Christians of Colosse to be upon their guard. He assures them that they cannot admit it in either form without forsaking Christ. Once admit that the work of Christ is insufficient, or that the revelation of Christ may be surpassed, and, however you may still profess to regard the gospel with veneration, and Christ Himself with esteem, you are seeking elsewhere for security and light, you are drifting away from Him, and, whatever creed you profess, you no longer hold the Head.

Eighteen hundred years have passed since these words were written. Judaism has long been buried in its grave; and the worship of angels is a thing of the past that no one could ever expect to see revived. But the old errors are not dead, and under new names they perpetually reappear. The works of Paul were written for his own century; they might have been written for ours. The two modern movements in the religious world that are attracting the most attention,

and apparently meeting with the greatest success, bear the most striking resemblance to those which had disturbed the Colossian Church ; and our only reason for introducing the subject at all is, that they are not only shaking the faith of some, but are striving hard to push their way in the Church, and are regarded on every hand with anxiety and alarm.

Ritualism, so far as we can understand it, has no other footing for its pretensions, and no other ground for its claims, than the insufficiency of faith in Christ and our incompleteness in Him. However it may clothe its doctrines in guarded words, and affirm the steadfastness of its faith, the whole spirit of the movement is the insufficiency of Christ. The exaggerated worth attached to outward ceremonies, the emphatic assertion of sacramental efficacy, the importance given to confession, absolution, and every function of the priest, all teach the same thing—namely, that we are not complete in Christ, and that these alone can make us really secure. And this is the only point at which we need care to look. We have nothing to do with the mode of worship which ritualists or others may prefer to adopt. It does not concern us at all that they burn incense in their churches, intone their prayers, place a cross upon the altar, wear coloured vestments at the communion, and seek to give effect to their worship by imposing music and gorgeous processions. But when all this is but the attractive drapery of the most pernicious doctrines, of priestly power

to bind and loose, of sacramental efficacy, which is both essential and sufficient for salvation, and of that which is the worst of all, the offerings by the priest of a continual sacrifice for sin, so completely does it throw Christ and the gospel of Christ into the shade, that we cannot pass it by. Seek your salvation by such means as these, and the priest becomes your saviour, sacraments the foundation of your hope, and the ritual your guide. They lead inevitably away from Christ, and you will soon cease to "hold the Head."

Spiritualism, as it is now called, leads to the same results by a very different road. If it were nothing more than a new mode of scientific research, we should neither care to deal with it, nor desire to stop it. The spirit of inquiry is honourable in all, and all thoughtful research is to be highly commended. But this professes to follow up the revelation of truth, not by the researches of man, but by the invocation of spirits unseen. As the Colossians were taught that by invoking angels they could obtain new revelations and further insight into the spirit-world, and thus it would be possible to intrude into things not seen; so do modern spiritualists maintain that by the invocation of spirits they can discover what Christ failed to teach, and leave His revelation far behind. And in this respect we can see no difference between the movement of the first century and that of our own. The spirit of both is the insufficiency of the Christian reve-

lation, and the tendency of both to lead away from Christ. Spirits are invoked to tell what Christ has told far better before, and revelations professedly obtained which will not bear a moment's comparison with those which He had made. And yet the effect is too obviously just the same as in the days of Paul. Christ is left for lesser lights; the Bible is neglected for newer revelations; and, under the stimulus of an unhealthy curiosity, the belief gains ground that we can advance beyond the gospel, and are not complete in Christ.

III.—*The spirit of unbelief out of which both these errors sprang.*

It is worthy of notice that the things mentioned by Paul as practised by the false teachers of Colosse were nearly all of them such as he had at other times pronounced to be quite harmless in themselves. He saw no necessary harm in circumcision, for he had taken Timothy and circumcised him. He could not see any real harm in holy days, or Sabbaths, for he both went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and went up to Jerusalem to the feasts. He maintained at other times the right of every man to regulate his own diet, and to eat meat or herbs as he pleased. And, inasmuch as some of the holiest men had been visited by angels, and he had received a visit from the angel of the Lord, it cannot have been in the fact that angels' visits were desired that the real evil

lay. He knew well that the zeal of both teachers and disciples sprang out of a deep-seated distrust in the sufficiency of faith in Christ, and in the completeness of the Christian revelation. The importance attached to all these things was proof enough of this. Their faith had little root. Belief was the profession of their lips, but the real groundwork of the whole was growing unbelief. And are we wrong in saying that it is so still? If the ritualism, which is unquestionably on the increase, and of which so much is heard, were nothing but the expression of a desire for a more æsthetic worship, a more refined taste, and a more impressive and attractive service of praise, we might even wish it success in its enterprise. This is no doubt to a great extent the secret of its power, and no mistake could well be greater than to suppose that the way to meet it is to keep our own service dreary and our singing bad. But this is not the meaning of the whole. That exaggeration of the worth and power of sacraments, that claim to priestly power, that perpetual round of holy days, with their ritual services and fasts, that incense and procession, all spring from a desire to add to the work that Christ has accomplished, to increase the safety which simple faith ensures; in other words, from unbelief in the fact that we are complete in Christ.

And the other movement too truly indicates the same. No doubt the crowd are attracted still by vague curiosity and the old desire of the Athenians to hear some new thing. But there are men more thoroughly

in earnest, who are either seeking, or think they have found, a new revelation. And what explains the earnestness they manifest? How is it that men will spend whole evenings in listening for the revelations of a spirit, who have never spent half the time in reading or studying the revelations of Christ, and who welcome as a God-sent message some feeble echo of the very words of Christ which they possess in their Bibles and might read for themselves? Is it not that the Bible has lost its hold, that they think they have outgrown its teaching and exhausted all its truths? We could confidently appeal to the candour of many and ask, Was not Paul right in his judgment? You have really ceased to "hold the Head." You are drifting away from Christ. You are not satisfied that in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. There is a strong latent unbelief at the bottom of the whole. You are hiding Christ from yourselves by your invocation of spirits, and seeking to get new revelations for yourselves, just because you do not believe that we are complete in Christ.

IV.—*The true safeguard against all such evils.*

"Ye are complete *in Christ*." These words denote not merely the completeness of Christ in relation to us, but our own personal union with Him. "*In Him*." This was the emphatic statement of Christ: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." And hence the earnest desire of Paul that his

readers should be "rooted and built up in Christ," and that they should hold "the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." This was, and still is, the true secret of all stability. Our fickleness or firmness, our being satisfied with Christ or seeking satisfaction elsewhere, all depends upon the reality of our own union to Christ, and the extent to which we "hold the Head."

And this explains the apostle's mode of dealing with both these questions. Had he been some modern theologian, he would no doubt have met them in a very different way. He would have gone into the whole question of the repeal of certain canons of the Mosaic law. The existing force of the Old Testament ritual would have been thoroughly discussed, and the binding nature of certain ordinances would have been all passed in review. He would also have taken up the question whether the angels referred to were real or fictitious, good or bad, and whether the phenomena were produced by magnetism, machinery, or spiritual power. He does nothing of the kind. He goes at once to the point: real or unreal, repealed or unrepealed, one thing condemns them all—they lead away from Christ. This is enough for him. You cannot seek for new revelations, intrude into things not seen, go to angels for new light, without becoming dissatisfied with Christ, and going quite away from Him. Nor can you seek by any means whatever to secure greater holiness and truer safety than Christ gives to

those who believe, without showing that already your faith in Christ is giving way, and losing eventually all your hold. This was to him the only thing worth contending for at all. The one thing needful is that you yourself should be in Christ, rooted and built up in Him. If you are, you will never need or wish to go elsewhere for safety, sanctity, or light. Abide in Him, and you are complete in Him ; for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.

And this is the great point still. We have no anxiety to settle the question whether certain canons have been repealed, or whether certain sounds and signs proceed from spirits, real or unreal, good or bad ; but we are supremely anxious that neither the one nor the other should draw you away from Christ, or weaken your desire to abide in Him. "Ye are complete in Him." Have faith in Christ, and your salvation is sure. Abide in Him, and nothing can be needed to add to your safety, nor can anything diminish it or take it away. Build on the foundation He has laid, and nothing can destroy your security or peace. But go away from Him, and look for greater safety to either sacrament or priest, and soon your peace will be broken and your security gone. Abide in Christ, and the nearer you live to Him the more will you discover that in His Word there are depths of wisdom you have never fathomed yet ; and that by the more earnest study of that Word, where you behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, you may be led into all the truth. The Spirit of God, taking of the

things of Christ, will open before you fields unexplored, and deep mines of glorious truth into which you have never gone, and unlock many a treasure of wisdom and knowledge that has hitherto been hid in Christ. But search elsewhere for new revelation, and wherever you are led you will assuredly soon be led into darkness and not into light—you will be led away from Christ, in whom is all truth.

We are complete in Christ. Let us, therefore, guard our hearts with all diligence against the entrance of unbelief. No power can strengthen the foundations He has laid, no new sacrifice enhance the worth of the atonement He made for our sin: no priestly absolution enlarge the range of His forgiving love, and no priestly hand confer a holiness that faith in Him will not secure. His work is perfect, and His Word complete. Spirits of air, however called, can lead us no further than the Spirit of Christ; and all the spiritual light that we shall ever get on earth is the light that has yet to break forth from His Holy Word. And whoever may pretend to show me a better foundation for my hope, and a better revelation to throw light upon my road to heaven, it is enough for me that I am complete in Christ, and all my desire in life and death is to abide in Him.

"Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'll call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart."

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.

"*He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice, and a stranger will they not follow.*"—JOHN x. 3–5.

THE Gospel of John is distinguished from the other three by the marked connection which we constantly find between the incidents narrated and the discourses which follow. The other evangelists give the incidents for their own sake. John seems invariably to give them for the sake of introducing the discourse for which they prepared the way. This is the case here. Jesus had just opened the eyes of a man born blind. The man himself at the time knew nothing of Him; but he had already drawn his own inferences when he was subjected to the inquisitorial examination of the Pharisees. The next time that Jesus meets him, he is quite prepared at His voice to say, "Lord, I believe." But there were others not so ready, and some not ready at all. Yet the miracle itself led many to ask, "Is this the Messiah?" And to this inquiry Jesus addresses Himself. He takes their own familiar test. He was to be a shep-

herd, to "feed His flock like a shepherd, and gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that had young ones running by their side." He bids them apply this test to Him. Was He acting the part of a Good Shepherd or not? Moreover, there were other tests of a true shepherd as distinguished from a stranger and a hireling. Thus, to the true shepherd the porter opens. There have been different opinions as to the porter intended here. Some find him in Moses and the law, others in the prophets; some in the Scriptures generally, others in John the Baptist. But it cannot be right to stop with these, since they all spake and acted as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. In one sense we may find Him in all of these. But if we do we must find Him at last really in God, who through laws and prophets, through all the Scriptures, and at last through John, did actually open the door for Christ, the true Shepherd, to enter the fold. And to these, as the test of the Good Shepherd, Christ appeals. Take the law and the prophets, the teaching of the Scriptures, and, if you will, the message of John, and see whether I am not the Shepherd for whom they all prepared the way, and through whom God, the only doorkeeper, is now opening the door.

And He supplies a still further test—the sheep hear His voice and follow Him. Many a pretended shepherd had appeared, with the proud boast that he was the Messiah; but the true sheep who "were waiting

for the consolation of Israel" did not follow Him. "But My voice they know at once. Like this blind man they are ready to say, Lord, I believe."

And the last test had yet to come. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The pretender may gather a crowd, and lead them into the wilderness; but at the first sound of danger he is sure to run and leave his sheep to take care of themselves, and, for aught he cares, to perish. The true shepherd will stand by the sheep, and, if need be, die to save them. "Watch Me. If I run in the hour of danger I shall prove Myself a hireling too; but if I stand and die, that they may be saved, you may know by all these tokens that I am indeed the true Shepherd of the flock." And this is the standing sign: "The sheep hear His voice; and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice."

In these words the first thing pointed out is—

1.—*The personal relation in which Christ stands to His people.*

"He calleth His own sheep by name." This is not an imaginary figure. We have no such custom as that of giving names to individual sheep; no such ability to distinguish them as to render this even possible. But we give names to our dogs, and they answer to their names. And what we do with the

dog, the Eastern shepherd does with his sheep. He knows them singly, names them separately, and they answer to their names. And such is the relation between Christ and His followers.

There are few facts that we are less able to grasp, and more liable to let slip, than this close, intimate, and personal union which exists between the Saviour and every one of His disciples. We can comprehend the call of such men as Philip, Peter, and Paul, and the personal intimacy which existed between them and Jesus; but *we* seem lost in a crowd. Can we be as intimately known? Is His call to us as direct and personal? Does He know us, or does He really call us *by name?* The Saviour Himself answers the question—"He calleth His own sheep by name." As surely as He called by name a Moses or a Cyrus, and even with the myriads of the stars of heaven, "calleth them all by their names," not missing a single one, so surely will He, through all the ages, however great may be the "multitude which no man can number," have of every one a knowledge so intimate, and give to every one a guidance so personal, so constant and direct, that none will be lost in that countless crowd, but He will call them all by their names.

And these words admit of the very widest application. They do not refer to the first call to repentance, or the final call to heaven merely, but are equally applicable to every place and every portion of our Christian life, whether on earth or in heaven.

1. The *first call to Himself* is a personal call.

We are obliged to make our appeal, for the most part, in the most general manner. "Ho! every one that thirsteth," is the standing type of our invitations and our appeals. The arrow must be drawn at a venture, and the seed sown beside all waters, and scattered over lands of every kind. But while we are making these widespread proclamations, He makes a far more direct and personal appeal. With as much distinctness as that with which He called a Cyrus, though he heard not His voice, and calls the stars that have no hearing to shine at their appointed place and with their appointed brightness; yea, with as much distinctness as that with which He called Matthew from the receipt of custom, or Peter from the fishing net, does He now say to you, "Arise, and follow Me!"

2. The *call to service* is a personal one.

We are too ready to look upon the service required of us as something of a very indefinite and general character. We admit that there is a certain amount of work to be done, and that some one ought to do it. But the duty is no more mine than yours. And thus, what is everybody's business is nobody's business; and because no one says, "It is *my* work," the work itself is often left undone. But this is a great mistake. The talents are given individually, and given to all the servants. The call to Barnabas and

Saul was not an exception, but an illustration of a universal rule. The summons "Go thou" is addressed directly to every one. We are constantly hearing, perhaps using, the expression, "The Church's work." The Church's work?—there is no such thing. It is *your* work. Christ does not say, Go to work as a Church, but, Go to work as individuals. No matter how much or how little has to be accomplished by the whole, your powers and opportunities, and therefore your duty and your call, are definite and precise. And whatever it be that Christ has for you to do, to that He calls, and calls you by your name.

3. The *call to suffering* is an individual call.

The call to suffer is one of the most honourable vocations of all, and the gift to suffer in a Christlike way the highest gift that any one can receive. There are only a few chosen spirits that Christ calls to suffer much, to pass through both deep waters and burning fire; probably because so few would know how to suffer well. But all have their burden, and their proper share. To a man like Paul the first revelation made is, "I will show him how great things he must suffer." But to all, in some form, "it is *given* to suffer." And here, again, we are too ready to meet it with the old heathenish notion, that of course it must come, and we must make up our minds to bear it. Must come? The Epicureans and Stoics knew as much as that. But what they did not know was that there was

a *will* behind the *must*, and that the will of a tender Shepherd, leading often by rough roads and stony deserts, choosing our way, appointing our trials, and always keeping a watchful eye as He goes before and picks our road. He does not want to save us from trouble; He wants rather to teach us how to bear it. He never "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," though He often tempers the shorn lamb to the wind, giving inward strength rather than an outward lull. But whatever the trial, it is He who sends it; He who says, "Bear it—yes, bear it for Me;" and to our trials great and small He still calleth by name.

It is very important that we should thoroughly recognise this, and lay hold of it with a firm grasp. *As a ground of confidence it is important.* It is a great thing to know that we have hold of Christ, but greater far to know that Christ has hold of us. To a drowning man there is a sense of safety in the grasp of a rope; yet his muscles may relax, his hands be seized with cramp, or his power go before he reaches the shore. But if a stronger hand has taken hold of *him*, how much greater his safety then. So is it with us, whatever the strength of our faith may be. Our safety is so great, not because we have hold of Christ, but because He has laid such firm hold of us, and we are called by name.

And, secondly, it is important as a *stimulus to activity*. There is enough in the world around us to kindle enthusiasm for work in any but the coldest

hearts. But we are so fond of ease, that if we have nothing more than this outward appeal we shall soon find reasons for leaving the work to others. But let the love of Christ constrain us; let us feel that it is He who calls; let the liking to do His will be the great motive power, and there will be no thought of leaving to others what He has summoned us to do. The fire of enthusiasm soon burns out if it be fed by nothing but the fuel that our own feelings supply. The only fire that will burn steadily, or burn to the end, is the fire that was kindled by the call of the Lord, and is sustained by the perpetual recollection of the fact too often ignored, He calleth thee by name.

And, thirdly, it is equally needful as a *support in suffering*. The attempt to discover the means of relieving suffering, or increasing the strength to bear it, is one that all have made, but in which most have failed. The Epicurean sought to modify the pain by increasing the pleasure. The Stoic taught that the best way to endure it was to steel the nerves and bear it like a man. Job's friends imagined that they could comfort him in the midst of his unparalleled trials by proving that he deserved them all. Miserable comforters indeed were they all. The sharpness of pain cannot be blunted by philosophy, nor the strength to bear it increased by conclusive arguments. There are even times when the condolence of friends adds to the burden, and the sorrowing heart would rather be left alone. But in that solitude, though the agony be the

agony of Gethsemane, or the cup the most bitter ever given to drink, there is one thing that will give peace —the assurance that it is "the cup which my Father has given me," and grace to say, "Thy will be done." Let us try this, and it will never really fail. When the floods are highest, the fire fiercest, the clouds all around us blackest, here will be all the support we need if we can only keep firm hold of the fact, "to this too He hath called thee by name."

II.—In these words we also learn, *The manner in which Christ guides His people.*

"He goeth before them." This, again, is founded upon the Eastern custom. With us the shepherd or drover goes behind, and by the help of whip and dogs sends all the sheep before him. In the East the shepherd leads the way, trusting to the sheep to follow him. Thus, while he chooses their way, he has no need of driving to ensure their coming after.

There are two things implied in these words :—

1. The mode of guidance which Christ adopts is to lead, not to drive.

Even under the Old Testament, which was the foreshadowing and commencement of the great pastoral work of Christ, personal confidence and affection were the strongest and most enduring of all motive powers. It was love to God which kept not only Abraham, Moses, and David true to their calling, but it was that

which lay at the root of all the fidelity which distinguished the pious Jew. But under the law this was thrown into the shade by the perpetual reiteration of the word of command. "Thou shalt" was more frequent than "I will." Under the New Testament all command gives place to the power of personal influence and reciprocated love. "The love of Christ constraineth us." The Christian life in its healthy state, and when properly understood, is not one of legal or compulsory service. The believer in Christ is not impelled by fear or cramped by law. His heart is in his work, because Christ is in his heart; and the impelling force is the simple but almighty force of love. To those outside, who know nothing of the true spirit of Christianity, the Christian life must appear to be a dull, cold life of weariness and toil. And such, we fear, it sometimes is to those within the Church as well as to those without. But a Christian life is not an exception in this respect. All pursuits are dull and wearisome to those who have no liking for them, and no love to give them a charm. Love and liking are great lighteners of labour. Put any man to a painter's easel without a painter's soul within him, and all his life will be nothing but the wearisome reiteration of mixing colours, and covering canvas with paint. Or set a man to an astronomer's night of sleepless watching, without a spark of interest in the night's long work, and the morning would tell a certain tale of weariness and misery. Work without heart is slavish

toil, but heart in your work turns the drudgery of the slave into the pride and glory of the free. A Christian life without Christian love, Christian service without a Christian heart, must ever be a wearisome and unmeaning toil. If performed by compulsion, if we were driven by threatening or command, it would be slavery of the hardest kind. But Christ wants no such service. It would be as wearisome for Him to watch as ever it could be to us to perform. He wants the love and heart before He calls to the service. Let us love Him, and all is changed. Christ in the heart gives heart for Christ's service. The heart we throw into the work transforms labour into luxury, and substitutes pleasure for pain. And this is what He desires. He wants no task service, for He cannot act the taskmaster. If He cannot have His work performed by loving hearts and earnest hands, He would rather not have it done at all. There is no driving with the Lord.

But the words suggest still more than this, namely, that—

2. To whatever path He calls us, He always goes before.

The contrast between Christ and other leaders is very apparent here. The scribes were eloquent and faithful enough in describing the duties of others. They "bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, but they themselves touched them not with

one of their fingers." And this is too often the case. "Do as I say, not as I do," is the appropriate motto for too much of our exhortation. The teacher raises a high standard in his words, but often exhibits a very low one in his life. With Christ it was never so. What He taught He did. And whatever His exhortation He always led the way.

(1.) His teaching was always embodied in His life. If He enforced the duty of truthfulness, He did no evil, neither was any guile found in His mouth. He exhorted to firm endurance; and He endured the contradiction of sinners, and when reviled, reviled not again. He taught the duty of submission by the constancy with which He said, "Thy will be done." He showed how to be merciful by going about doing good, and how to be obedient by finding His meat and drink in doing His Father's will. And the apostles, when urging the duty of self-sacrifice, could find no fitter words than "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." In all this He went before, and He does so still. Even now He is leading the way. By the perfect model of His life, and the leading of His Spirit, in every path of right He is before us wherever we go.

(2.) He calls to no service which He has not performed. We carry on the work, but He prepared the way. He laid the foundation, met the difficulties, and cleared the path; and He is doing so now. To whatever work He summons, He does not send us alone;

He still leads the way, and wherever we go Christ is before us there. He never asks us to work by ourselves. He is always at work at the very post to which we have been called. His words are still in force, "The works that I do shall ye do also." Not other works, but the very same works. Christ calls us to work with Him, not merely to work for Him. And whether the work be great or small, it is His work still, and He Himself is leading the way.

(3.) He calls to no sufferings which He has not borne. We are called to be partakers of His sufferings, not to bear sufferings of our own. The life He led on earth, viewed as a life of sorrow, was the precursor of all the sorrows His people have ever endured since then. We never can go to a deeper depth, or tread a more sorrowful road. "His way was much darker and rougher than mine." And even now He goes with us, goes before us, through the deep waters, the fierce conflict, and the dark valley. We cannot go, and find that He has not been before us, or that He is not with us there.

> "In every pang that rends the heart,
> The Man of Sorrows has a part."

He never sends us into the floods of tribulation and stands looking upon us from the shore. Nor does He give a bitter cup to any of His disciples, the contents of which He has not tasted Himself. He is touched with the feeling of all our infirmities. In all the severest trials of life, and—

"When I walk through death's cold shade,
My Shepherd's with me there."

III.—These words also show, *The readiness with which He is followed by His disciples.*

There is something very remarkable in the alacrity with which the first disciples attached themselves to one who was a perfect stranger. Such was the elective affinity which drew them that, at a word, they left all and followed Him. Philip and Nathanael, John and Andrew,—a single interview binds them for life. No other ever exerted such influence; no other could ever draw them away. They heard His voice and followed. It was not the miracles, the marvellous power, that held them spell-bound. They knew His voice. The charm of that voice was enough; His personal influence held them fast.

And this is still the case. It is never the keen logical argument, the demonstration from miracles, the volumes of evidences, or the bodies of divinity that make men Christians, however important they may all of them be. They may help us to throw off the chains of prejudice and infidelity that have kept us far away from Him. They may clear away some of the mist that has made Him invisible. But what makes any man a Christian is nothing more and nothing less than the same powerful personal influence which wins, and draws, and binds us fast in the strongest, yet softest, chains of confidence and love. "His sheep hear His voice and follow Him."

Here, then, we have—

1. The simple definition of a Christian.

He is one who follows Christ. There may be timid following, as when the first disciples followed and were afraid. There may be mistaken following, as when Thomas said, "Let us go that we may die with Him." There may be occasional attempts to lead instead of following, as when Peter stood in front of Christ and tried to persuade Him to take another road. There may even be momentary hesitations to go wherever He leads, as when they all forsook Him and fled. But these are passing exceptions. If our constant aim is not to follow, and follow wherever He leads, we lack the leading mark of a disciple, and we shall search in vain to find any other that will take its place. "My sheep hear My voice, and follow Me."

2. The test of a true Christian.

"They hear My voice." In other words, they keep an open ear for the voice of Christ, however loud and deafening, or however soft and bewitching, other sounds may be. In the noise of the world nothing is easier than to let them drown the voice of Christ. And yet, such are the tones of His voice—so different from all others, so audible amid the thunders of earth's loudest tumults, or the music of its most enchanting songs—that it is possible for any man to hear it if he will. Many are glad to have it drowned. The test

of the Christian, of every Christian, and of the Christian everywhere, is his simple and sincere desire to hear His voice in all—to hear and to follow, whoever calls away. There are competitors enough, false Messiahs still. 'Lo here! and lo there! are sounds we all hear. Attractions on every side call us away from Christ. But here Christians take their stand. "A stranger will they not follow;" but, amidst all attractions, they follow Him.

3. The true spirit of the Christian Life.

"They follow Me." The marked difference between the Oriental sheep and all others with which we are acquainted, or rather perhaps between the Eastern shepherd and all others, is this: all sheep will follow other sheep; the sheep of the East alone will leave other sheep to follow their own shepherd. They may all be grazing together, flocks of all kinds; but let the shepherd's call be heard, and they leave the rest at once to follow Him. Thus is it with Christ. He never felt it needful to fence about His sheep with artificial walls or outward barriers, to keep them from mixing in closest intimacy with other sheep, or even with the goats. "I pray not that Thou wouldst take them out of the world." He had more confidence in His own personal influence and hold than in any walls of separation that could possibly be reared. And He could safely do so. Real love to Christ will keep a man from sin, and keep a man from straying,

more than all the fences that Churches can raise, and all the anathemas that they can ever pronounce. This has been too much overlooked. Perhaps this personal love has been too little fostered or felt. We have been too ready to run with other sheep, and too reluctant to leave them when the Shepherd has called us away. We have followed the sheep more than the Shepherd, and often to our harm. In other words, our Church has sometimes become more than Christ, and the example of other Christians sufficient guide, whether Christ led the way or not. Our Christianity has been too much attachment to systems, acceptance of doctrines, and adhesion to the flock: too little a firm, sincere, and personal attachment to Christ Himself. Yet this is, after all, the one thing needful. If all else should be lost, this would keep us safe and keep us true. "They hear My voice and follow Me, and a stranger will they not follow."

In this touching description of Himself, Christ sets before us—

1. A good example.

We are all quite ready to wish well for others, and even to tell them what is good; but if we really want to do them good, the way is simple—"Go before them." Preachers of the Gospel, let us be examples to the flock. We may preach the truth, invite with

earnestness, warn with fidelity; but there is still a more excellent way. Let us preach with our lives, they are more powerful than words; and in all that is good, and true, and pure, and holy, let us go before them. Teachers of the young, none can overrate your influence or the value of your work. Yet how many of you have left untried the best instrument of all! You have told your children of Christ, have urged them to seek salvation; you would rejoice to see them join the Church as the fruit of your labour; yet you have all this while left your own part undone. You have not gone before them. And there are many parents of whom this is true. You hope to see your children grow up in the fear of the Lord. It would break your heart to see them wander into ways of worldliness and sin. In nothing would you rejoice more than to see them decide for Christ. And yet the very thing most likely to prove the turning-point in their history you yourself have neglected —you have not gone before them. Let the example of Christ be yours. He always leads the way.

2. He also supplies us with a very safe principle.

"He goeth before them." It is never right for us, therefore, to go when He is not leading the way. Many questions arise in our way through life as to things that are right or wrong. And they are more easy of solution than at first sight they seem. Is Christ leading the way? Answer that, and all will be

plain. But perhaps you say, "That is what I cannot tell." Then do not go. No matter who goes, or who approves, if you cannot hear the voice of Christ or see the guidance of Christ, wait till His voice is heard and His hand clearly seen. Your duty is to follow Christ, not to follow others. Listen for His voice, He will not keep you waiting long. But better far wait all your life, than go with doubt and misgiving, whether it is right to go, or whether Christ would have you there. Let your one wish be to follow Him; He will not fail to show the way.

But are you following at all? Christ is calling now. Do you not hear His voice? Sheep and goats are mixed together here, and the sheep are following Him. To which do you belong? To which would you belong? All depends on that. The line is not a fixed line here. Christ tells us that plainly enough. As though He were afraid that any might think these words of His cut them off from hope, He changes His figure, and says, "I am not only a shepherd, but I am also a door. You can come through Me into the fold, and then you are a sheep and I your shepherd." Yes, whatever you are now, if, like Saul, you have been a wolf devouring the flock, He would be a door to you. You could go through Him into the fold. He would change you into a Paul, one of the best of the sheep, and He as a shepherd would lead you too. The door is open, the Shepherd waiting to find you among the flock, and lead you beside the still waters

like the rest. But there will be a separation ; and when once the sheep are divided from the goats, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Go, then, at once to Him. Let Him lead you here. He will lead you through the valley of the shadow of death, and in the world beyond the grave, He, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, will lead you to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.

GOD'S GIFT SUPPRESSED.

"*Quench not the Spirit.*"—1 THESS. V. 19.

NO man could have greater confidence in the irresistible and indestructible might of the Spirit of God than the apostle Paul. All his heroic boldness in the face of his many foes, his firmness against the Jew, and his confidence and courage against the Greek, sprang not out of the natural daring and superior wisdom which he unquestionably possessed, but out of his implicit reliance on the Spirit of God. Though other men might think "his bodily presence weak, and his speech contemptible," yet, "strong in the Lord," he cared not, though all the powers of earth and air were ranged on one side, bolstered up by the wisdom of human philosophy and backed up by the fiercest fires of persecution, if only he could be sure that on the other side there was the Spirit of the living God. "Greater is He that is for us than all they that be against us." "The weapons of our warfare are. . . . mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

But this renders it the more strange that he should write as he does here. Could that bright light, then,

be extinguished, that fire be quenched, and the all-subduing be itself subdued? In what sense are we to understand these words; and where does the danger lie, against which we are exhorted to be upon our guard?

We see at once that *the words must be taken with some limits.* Not only is the living Spirit of God beyond the reach of human enmity to injure or destroy, and above the need of human friendship to foster and sustain, but the energy and might of the Spirit's work cannot be so resisted by men as to be ultimately unsuccessful. Not, indeed, that no men can put it from them—I have no such notion of irresistible grace as this—but that no human power can really put out the light, or prevent the ultimate triumph of the truth.

The reference in the text can only be to certain kinds of suppression that are within in the power even of the Church itself. And there can be no doubt, I think, that the apostle's primary allusion is to those peculiar modes in which the Spirit so frequently manifested its power in the early Church. So that, to understand the real meaning of the words, and at the same time to see clearly their bearing upon ourselves, it will be necessary to trace out as distinctly as possible the marked diversity and yet essential unity between the work of the Spirit in the days of the apostles and the work of the same Spirit in our own.

I shall simply arrange what I have to say upon the subject under these two heads :—

1.—*The possession of the Spirit the perpetual distinction of the Christian Church.*

The day of Pentecost, the true birthday of the Church, stands out in the history of the world as the day when the Spirit was poured out from on high. Not that this was the first appearance of the Spirit of God on the stage of the world's history. We know, indeed, comparatively little of its earlier work in the world ; yet the fact that it has always played a most important part in the moulding of human character and life hardly admits of a moment's hesitation or dispute. It was not only the same Spirit which calmed the troubled waves of the early chaos, and filled their depths with life ; but it gave to Samson his gigantic strength ; to Bezaleel, the great artist, his genius and skill ; to David his poetic fancy ; and to Elijah his prophetic fire. "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And we may even go further still, and say that the song of many a Gentile poet, and the lessons of many a Gentile philosopher, were not altogether without an impulse from the same Spirit of the Lord.

Yet amidst all this the gift of the Spirit was the object of a distinct promise to the Christian Church : apparently as something altogether new, evidently as something unparalleled before. Christ Himself spoke

of it as "the promise of the Father;" held it up as the greatest of all possible gifts, dependent upon His own departure, and worth losing His visible presence to obtain; whilst the apostles claimed it as the great fulfilment of prophecy, the culminating glory of the Christian dispensation, the true sign of "the last days."

The importance of this gift was still further attested by the phenomena which attended its coming. Not only did it come down with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and cloven tongues of fire, but these tongues rested on every head; and from the lips of all the assembled Church, as though tuned already to the music of heaven, there burst forth a song of celestial praise, which, as it floated on the breeze, carried to every man in his own tongue the wonderful works of God.

Nor was it only at the first rush that these effects were produced. As if to prove that this was no temporary phenomenon, no class endowment or merely national privilege, the same effects were repeated again and again. At Samaria, Corinth, or Ephesus faith in Christ is followed in precisely the same way by the reception of the Holy Ghost. And lest some narrow-minded Christian should affirm that this marvellous gift was either dependent on the touch of an apostle's hand, or restricted to the baptized, the Spirit itself set both aside, and fell directly on Cornelius and all that heard the apostle's word, so that they all spake with tongues.

It matters not what this gift of tongues really was ; whether, as some suppose, it was the ability to speak in foreign languages without the necessity of learning them, or, as others think, a Divine impulse to pour out thoughts and feeling in unearthly or celestial sounds. Whatever it was and whatever it symbolised, it stood prominently out as the proof of this great fact—that the Spirit of God had come down to men, not as an occasional visitant or merely to inspire the few, but to dwell in the Church, to inspire men of all classes and all nations, and to make of all believers temples of the Holy Ghost.

If we look again into that early Church, we shall find that the presence of the Spirit was also manifested in other remarkable ways. Foremost, of course, would ever be the greatest work of all, viz., the conversion and regeneration of the sinner, and the sanctification of the believer. But while the apostle never failed to keep this distinctly in view, it is not to this that he is referring here. And it is not for a moment because I regard this fact as one of trifling importance that I pass it by with these few words ; but that we may give the more direct attention to the question raised by these words : *What is the Spirit within the Church?*

Looking back, then, to that early Church, the first effect of the presence of the Spirit of God, and the one which seems to distinguish it above the Church of any later age, was *the special inspiration of many*

at least of the heralds or preachers of the truth. There are few questions of greater importance in the present day than this. On every hand the inspiration of the writers of our Bible has been fiercely assailed ; sometimes by the absolute denial that they had anything worthy of the name, and at other times by the polite admission that they were so inspired as to be worthy of a place not far removed from Socrates, Shakespeare, or Milton. Now I grant that it is not easy to lay down a theory of inspiration, which will fully satisfy even my own mind, to say nothing of the minds of others. Nor do I think that, amidst all the conflicting theories that have been proposed, the full solution of the mystery has been arrived at yet. But perfect theories are not essential to the establishment of facts ; and imperfect theories do not hinder the clearest perception of a fact. While the few have been settling the theory of light, the light itself has been shining brightly, and none but the blind have been unable to rejoice in it. And so it is with the inspiration of the great preachers and penmen of the Word of God. We may not be able to draw the exact line, and say who were and who were not inspired. It may be impossible to determine how long the gift was continued and when it came to an end. We are sometimes surprised that so little is said in the New Testament itself about a gift of such vast importance in our esteem. But for all that, when we look the facts fairly in the face, it does appear to us

that it would be just as wise to deny the shining of the sun as to dispute the inspiration of the first teachers of the Gospel. Nothing but this will ever explain the marvellous contrast, discernible in two short months, between Peter's ignorance or John's despair, and the unfaltering confidence, the clear statements, and the rich fulness of their earlier words; or between the maledictions of Saul in his blindness and the breadth and harmony with which he unfolds the whole Gospel of Christ. It is a matter of little moment to us to define exactly how much this inspiration included, or precisely how many were within the magic ring. But it is of incalculable importance to hold fast the fact that it was there, enabling the first teachers to unfold for all time the great truths of the kingdom. The Book, from their hands, comes with the demonstration of the Spirit. The truths from their lips or pens are not strung together for the daws of criticism to peck at, but are words of life, to be received as the choicest gifts of God; for, like their master, they speak as having authority, and not as the Scribes.

In addition to this gift of inspiration, we find the possession of the Spirit in the early Church followed on a much wider scale by *many other special gifts of miraculous or supernatural power.* Not only did the old gift of tongues burst out afresh in the Corinthian Church, and reach a climax unequalled elsewhere, but the new life and power of the Spirit were manifested

in unusual ability to teach and rule, and in the widespread capacity to prophesy, to heal the sick, and even to raise the dead.

It is to these gifts of the Spirit that the apostle apparently alludes. What they all were we shall never, perhaps, be able to affirm. Some were altogether miraculous. In some, the supernatural shaded off into the natural; and in others, were it not that the Spirit of God made *all* supernatural and Divine, we should be disposed to say that there was nothing superratural at all. It was throughout a wondrous stage in the Church's history, when every man felt a Divne afflatus within him, and when effects like these bore immediate testimony to the Spirit within. It was a grand epoch. It met a great need. It bore witness to the presence of a mighty power, and it produced stupendous results.

But with the first age these died away. I say, "the first age;" not that I think we are warranted in asserting that they were all buried in the tomb of the last of the apostles, or that it is possible to determine now the precise date at which they came to an end. But die out they did, and that before very long. It is true that the Church of Rome has ever laid claim to a continued and infallible inspiration, and even to miraculous powers. But her inspired infallibility has uttered too many absurdities, and has too often contradicted itself for her assertions to be worthy of regard; and her pretended miracles are too far-fetched and

extravagant to bear a moment's comparison with those of earlier days.

But why did they all die out as they did? Was it that the Spirit was itself withdrawn? The continued and growing triumphs of the Gospel proved the very opposite. Was it that the piety and faith of the Church declined? Many think so, and believe that they could be recovered still. But if the possession of the Spirit depended on the purity of the Church, it is passing strange that the most corrupt of all the apostolic Churches possessed the most striking gifts; whereas, in the midst of the fires of persecution, the gifts declined as the piety grew, and it was only in the darker ages of the Church that the claim was ever revived.

The explanation is much rather to be found in the fact that they had really done all their work, and their continuance would have done harm. The extraordinary was now to subside into the ordinary, and the miraculous to be brought within the category of regular law. Was this a loss of power? No doubt many think so. There are always men to be found who can see no force except in a storm, and always look for God in the earthquake, the whirlwind, and the fire. And many, doubtless, are ready to affirm that the first Christians, with their inspired teaches and their gifts of prophecy and tongues, must have been better off than we; and to cry out, almost in despair, "Oh for some inspiration to settle our differences,

and some miraculous power to compel the indifferent to listen to our word!"

Has the Church, then, suffered any loss? Was the Church of the first days better off than we are now, or had it really anything of which we are deprived? Unquestionably no! The Church has gained, not lost, and all it ever had it possesses still.

The inspiration to bring out new truth may have gone. But it has gone simply because we have all the truth. The revelation itself is here. When the world was all in darkness, God filled the heavens with sun, moon, and stars; and who ever imagines that it is any loss to us if He does not go on creating still? They are there for all time, and all we want is good eyes with which to see them, and improving telescopes to bring them near. And inasmuch as in this Bible we have the full light of Divine truth, and in the Christ of the Bible the Light of the world,—with the Bible in our hand and the Spirit of God in our hearts, we have all that inspiration itself ever did or could do for the Church of old. And though some few may then have climbed to heights we have not reached, and scanned a clear horizon far broader than our own, the Church as a whole was never in a position half so favourable for taking a full survey of the entire plain of Divine revelation, and never had a finer opportunity for entering into possession of all the truth. The miracles may have ceased. But what if some saints sleep quietly in Jesus whom we should be tempted to call

back from their graves? and what if it is only by improved surgery that the sick are healed, and by improved education that the ignorant are taught, and after careful study that we can speak in other tongues? Is this so great a loss? We can heal the sick, secure good teachers, and learn the languages of all the world; and it is only a morbid taste that desires from a miracle what we can obtain in other ways. All that those early miracles were really meant to accomplish can be accomplished still. Eighteen centuries of Christian work are to those who have eyes to see a far stronger evidence of the divinity of Christianity than all the miracles of the New Testament times. What though the eyes of the blind are not opened by our touch, and the graves do not give up their dead, the Spirit of God is still here, to open blind eyes and quicken those that are dead in trespasses and sins. The same Spirit which dwelt in the Church at Corinth is dwelling in the Church still, not to speak with tongues and work miracles, but to do greater things than these. Still is it in every Christian as truly and fully as in any early temple of the Holy Ghost. Still is it here, to lead the sons of God to their Father's home; to sanctify those who believe; to make words of weakness into words of mighty power; to lead the thinking and inquiring from truth to truth, till words have life and creeds are really believed. Still have we here in the Spirit of God the living stream that cleanses, the golden chain that

draws up to heaven, the power that sanctifies and saves.

II.—*Quenching the Spirit, the standing danger of the Christian Church.*

It follows, from what has been already said, that the danger referred to not only is not always the same, but may vary from age to age. The nature of the danger changes; the danger itself remains. We cannot quench the Spirit as they could, and they were not exposed to the dangers which beset ourselves. Inspired men may have had their temptations to suppress the truth in face of danger or from the power of prejudice, or even to pervert it for the sake of reward. And had they done this—had Peter, when the sheet was drawn up, refused to learn the lesson that it taught, and sent the messengers of Cornelius away; had Paul held back from the heathen, to whom he preached Christ, the freedom he was commissioned to proclaim, and preached circumcision instead; had the apostles, for fear of any consequences, allowed a Judaizing Gospel to be proclaimed—they would, indeed, have quenched the Spirit with most disastrous results. We have no such inspiration; no such results are dependent on the course we take; no new truth is revealed for us to keep back; we cannot in this way quench the Spirit. Or had the Church itself by an arbitrary law decreed that the rules of the old synagogue should still be rigidly observed; had all

speaking with tongues, all irregular prophesying, all unofficial working of miracles been studiously suppressed, this would have been the very quenching of the Spirit to which the apostle refers. But we have no miraculous powers to suppress ; no speaking with tongues to put down ; no prophesying to silence ; we cannot in this way quench the Spirit. Nevertheless, the possibility still remains, and the danger still exists.

1. We quench the Spirit, then, if ever we wilfully suppress or hide the truth.

We all admit that if inspired apostles had seen a whole truth and kept back half—had seen both sides themselves, and shown us only one—they would to that extent have extinguished the light, or quenched the Spirit. And what is true of them must be no less true of others. The fact of inspiration cannot make all the difference. It matters little whether I light half the lamps instead of the whole, or lock up one half when others have lighted the whole. And so it would make but little difference whether an inspired man refused to speak the truth, or one uninspired kept it back when spoken. And this has been done again and again. For some time the Church of Rome deliberately kept the Word of God locked up in a language that few could read, while teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And even now that it has been thrown open, and we can sit under our own vine and fig-tree and read for ourselves, there

are many ways in which the truth is hidden, and the Spirit quenched. How many there are who never take the Bible in their hands with an honest resolution to find out what really is the mind of the Spirit, or the meaning of the words! Bound down by old creeds, fettered by authoritative articles, or hampered by the fear of some imaginary heresy, they make their own Bible as they go along. The Spirit of God may still be prayed for, and its teaching still be desired; but even while they pray for it they take care to bind it down by conditions of their own. The earnest prayer of one man is that he may be led into all the truth, provided it does not contradict the Thirty-nine Articles or the Athanasian Creed; the Calvinist is open to conviction on every point, provided always he is kept clear of Arminianism; and the Arminian will follow the Spirit wherever He leads unless it should be into Calvinism. The Baptist admits his need of further light on every point *except* the subject of baptism; and many of those who differ from him equally hold that subject sacred, as a settled point that is never to be opened again. Now, I am not indifferent to the worth of creeds or the importance of sound doctrine; and though I do think we have ridden our sectarian differences too far, and made our denominational walls too strong and unyielding, yet I suppose even these must be regarded as "good for the present distress." The old creeds have done good service in their time in throwing up entrenchments

against the foe. Well-defined doctrines have helped many a wayfaring man to know where he really was, and sectarian differences have brought out truths which would otherwise have been neglected or forgotten. But if creeds are to be retained, when the chief purpose they serve is to block out the view of fields beyond; if well-defined doctrines really mean that the Spirit of God must make us think precisely as our fathers thought before us; and if the only effect of sectarian differences is to prevent the ranks on one side from ever seeing the distinctive truths the others hold so firmly, and so dearly love—then it were better far that we could all read the Bible for ourselves, with nothing but the Spirit of God to guide us, and that creeds, confessions, and sects were all swept away. If we once say in our hearts, the Spirit of God itself shall open no new road to carry me off the rails on which my fathers were content to run, shall let in no light to shake my implicit faith in the creed my fathers taught me, shall never bring me to believe that in any point some other sect may possibly be right, and I may possibly be wrong, we are so far quenching the Spirit of God. And better far a Church without a creed than a Church without the Spirit. And infinitely better a union of all Christians, led simply by the Spirit of the Lord, than rigid sects whose divisions fetter their freedom, strengthen their prejudices, contract their horizon, and so quench the Spirit.

2. By unduly restricting the usefulness of others.

In the early Church the possession of the Spirit was often manifested immediately by special signs. Every believer had the Spirit. And whether the possession of the Spirit communicated some new power, or strengthened, refined, and exalted one already possesed, in either case it involved responsibility, whilst the special gift determined the duty or ministry that each had to perform. One of the earliest, clearest, and, to my mind, dearest principles upon which the Church was founded was the universal ministry of believers in Christ. There were "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;" and the "manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man to do good with." Whoever, then, restrained, forbade, or silenced the gifts imparted by the Spirit, did so far quench the Spirit.

But does the same law hold good still? To my mind it certainly does; and there are few truths which we need more strongly to enforce than that every Christian has received a Divine call, is endowed with a Divine Spirit, and is in possession of some Divine *charisma*, or spiritual gift. Does this imply that the Church has therefore no further need of pastors, teachers, ministers, in the ordinary sense of the word? By no means. In my opinion we cannot overrate the importance of good government and good teaching, and, therefore, of good pastors and good teachers. The two are not incompatible. We are none of us

ministers apart from the Church, but simply as part of the ministering Church. There is no distinction between God's *laos*, or laity, and His *kleros*, or clergy. Your ministry is on precisely the same level as our own; and since the ministry of visiting the sick and teaching the young, and the ministry of giving and getting too, are as sacred as that of bishop or pastor, it is greatly to be desired that this fact were recognised by all our Churches, and the one as thoroughly organised as the other. I believe in no special call to ministry in the Church, because I believe in the call of every Christian, and the gift of the Spirit to them all. God has not endowed us all alike, but He has endowed us all. And whether your peculiar talent lie in the head or hand, whether it be capacity for the desk or the pulpit, for teaching or for trade, that gift, sanctified by the Spirit of God, determines your ministry in the Church of Christ. Suppress that talent, pervert its purpose, or waste your time, and you so far quench the Spirit. If ever we are to realise the true ideal of a Church, we shall not have a Church without pastors and teachers, and universal exhortation taking their place; nor shall we have the man of business neglecting the work for which he is well qualified for the performance of duties for which he is not qualified at all. But we shall have, I think, the far nobler spectacle of men of business trading for Christ, and getting to have the more to give; students of all kinds studying for Christ; and men of science bringing their

resources to bear more directly upon His cause; while all, both rich and poor, unite with gifts of endless variety, to spread His kingdom in the world. And whatever hinders this—whether it spring from superstitious notions of what the ministry of the gospel really is, or from the still more superstitious notion that business is too secular to form a branch of the Saviour's work, or from priestly jealousy on the part of those in office, or from the dread of study and research—is to that extent quenching the Spirit of God.

Of all the dangers that beset the Church in this respect, one of the greatest is that of extinguishing light, or quenching the Spirit, by the official assumption that the Spirit of God must be restricted to certain unvarying modes and forms. The very disciples forbade a man to cast out devils, because he was not one of themselves; and it took some time to persuade the Church at Jerusalem that it was a right thing for a Church to grow up at Antioch in so irregular a way. Had not the Spirit of God been stronger than the Church, Luther and the other reformers would never have published the Bible to the world; Carey would not have carried the Gospel to the heathen; and Wesley would never have preached a simple warm-hearted Gospel through the length and breadth of the land. The national Church of our fatherland tried hard in past times to compel the Spirit of God to adopt its shibboleth, and convey all the water of

life through the pipes that it had laid down. It would have silenced a Bunyan rather than admit that a separatist of any kind could convey the light of life to the world. And now that such men are shining through their works as stars in the firmament of heaven, now that the power of tens of thousands of free churches is felt through the land to be a power for good, cold is the encouragement that many give them, and timid the recognition they receive.

But why speak of others? Is it not the fact that there is a power for good locked up in many of our own Churches which ought to be called forth, and by the suppression of which, whether by official jealousy on our own part or by selfish indolence on the part of those who ought to work, the Spirit itself is quenched or extinguished? I do not know exactly how we should set to work to remedy the evil, but I do think that we who are pastors have not yet got the right knack of fulfilling one of the most important duties of our office, viz., to perfect the saints for the work of their ministry. We do far too much ourselves; just because it is always much easier to do a thing yourself than to set others to do it. But the *busy pastor is not always the best.* As the most successful general would not be one who ran about in the vain attempt to fire off every gun and defend every post himself, but one who could put the right man in the right place, fill other hearts with enthusiasm and courage, and direct them with the requisite wisdom and skill;

so the successful pastor is not one who tries, beyond all human strength, to do all the visiting, all the preaching, all the thinking, all the working for his people ; but one who can discover latent talent, and set it to work ; stimulate vacant minds, and set them to think ; find out the unoccupied, and give them someting to do ; and, by a genial influence upon such as are able to give, succeed in making them cheerful givers. In a Church so trained the Spirit will work with freedom and energy ; in others, it will be cramped and confined. I know no problem of greater importance than how to bring out this hidden talent in our Churches, so that it shall work in a healthy, holy, and useful way. And, much as I should shrink from an invasion of universal exhortation, I could almost say, better even *that*, with all its trial of patience and weary waste of time, if it will really set the Spirit free to choose its own instruments and give them work to do, than a cold and proud officialism, which damps all energies, and ends by quenching all the light and fire that had otherwise been kindled by the Spirit of God.

3. By avoiding an honest search for truth.

We have no such inspiration now as could enlarge the Bible or add to its truths. It contains the whole truth. We no more expect a new edition of Christianity, amended and enlarged, than we expect new strata to be added to our earth, and new metals poured into its mines. But, as men of science have

been engaged for centuries in exploring the earth, and are for ever bringing up something new to us, though it must have lain where they found it for myriads of years ; so he who, with the help of God's Spirit, will honestly and earnestly dig in this book as for hid treasure, will find that we have not yet discovered all the truth, and God has more light to burst forth from both His works and word. But if we read with an assumption that we do know all that is worth knowing, and a determination that the Spirit shall teach us nothing more ; or if, to escape unwelcome conclusions, we explain and explain away, and read between the lines, or break off every thread that would lead us where we do not wish to go, we make the promised Spirit's guidance of no worth at all, and when we have it, quench the Spirit.

4. Still more do we do this by suppressing our own convictions.

The Spirit does not come to Christians now as it came to Peter, bidding him go to Cornelius, nothing doubting, or to Paul, to prevent his going to Bithynia, and direct his course to Troas. But in ways no less distinct and clear does it produce convictions of duty that cannot be altogether ignored. If, then, with such convictions, for the sake of pleasure, ease, or gain, we force our conscience, turn away from the goal, shut our eyes to the duty, and will not go, "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.'

Or if, on the other hand, with strong misgivings, grave doubts, we do the thing our consciences condemn, and touch what we feel to be forbidden, "whatsoever is not of faith is," also, "sin." The Spirit has said, "This is the way, walk ye in it," and we have quenched the Spirit.

5. And, lastly, we do so by disregarding the feelings which the Spirit awakens in our hearts.

There is no monotony in the work of the Spirit, even in the work of conversion. There are many in whose hearts from the very cradle there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, and others whose earliest longings for spiritual life begin in their old age. Some are drawn by influences as gentle as those which draw the flower to the light, and others driven as by the lightning and the storm. And many are woefully mistaken here. Waiting for their neighbour's experience, they attach but little importance to their own. Expecting to be driven, they will not be drawn, and with their ears on the stretch for a trumpet blast, they never catch the still small voice. Some, probably, quench the Spirit in this way. Firmly believing that they do know whence it cometh and whither it goeth, they "know not the day of their visitation."

But there are others who know it well enough. The voice of conscience, the leaning of the heart, are clear enough at times. My friends, we call it conscience and the heart, but I confidently claim it all for the

Spirit of God. And if ever an impression has been made upon your heart—if ever a gentle voice has said, "You ought to be a Christian," or a passing softer feeling in your heart has said, "I wish I were a Christian"—at that moment the Spirit of God was with you; and if you let it pass, and the thought vanished unheeded, and the feeling died without an effort or a prayer, "you quenched the Spirit." Oh, then, if ever such a moment should return, grasp it as a priceless opportunity; hold it fast; let it not go; it is thy life. This time, at least, "quench not the Spirit."

And now, brethren, let us all awake to a fuller consciousness of the worth and glory of the gift we possess. Without this Spirit we might indeed stand appalled before the difficulties that meet us in the Word of God; the perpetual attacks that are made upon it by those who only study the works of God; the endless and apparently hopeless diversities and disagreements that divide the Church against itself; the strongholds of error and sin that we find in our own hearts and see apparently impregnable all over the world; and, as we think of our utter impotence and selfish indolence, might well exclaim, "who is sufficient for these things?" But with this Spirit we have nothing to fear. Let us only accept His guidance, trust to His teaching, and rely upon His power, and we shall assuredly find "the crooked paths straight and the rough places plain." The enigmas that now

perplex us would be solved; the divisions that enfeeble us would soon be healed; the assaults of infidelity would be bravely borne; the searching criticism of an honest science, which, though sometimes apparently hostile, is really a friend in disguise, would be courted rather than maligned; and for her great work of converting the world to Christ, the Church would gird herself with braver heart and stronger hand, if only, instead of "quenching the Spirit," she would give to that Spirit a more hearty, generous, and unsparing confidence; hold fast to her standing principle, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds;" and still adopt the grand watchword of both the old covenant and the new —"NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT, SAITH THE LORD."

FAITHFUL IN A LITTLE.*

"*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.*" — LUKE xvi. 10.

THESE words not only form part of the parable of the unjust steward; but are really the key to the whole. The parable, like many other portions of Scripture, is clear enough in its general meaning, though it is very difficult to fix the precise sense of every word. There are few passages of the Bible, therefore, not excepting the Book of Revelation, which have received a larger number of interpretations. One of the greatest difficulties arises from the fact that the man commended as an example is a fraudulent steward. Yet this need not cause any difficulty. There may be points even in the conduct of bad men from which we might learn a lesson; but we are not to hold their badness in less abhorrence in consequence. Paul tells us to look at the racers and combatants, running and fighting for a corruptible crown, and imitate them. But he does not mean that we are to learn our morality from the racecourse, or even go to the races with the idea of getting any good there, much less that we are to fight and run

* Preached on behalf of the Sunday School.

for a similar crown. Solomon sends the sluggard to the ant, not to lead the life of an ant, but to look at the activity and diligence of the ant. And so here the meaning is plain. The dishonesty of the steward is a thing we are to avoid; but the prudence and energy and thoughtfulness of even a dishonest steward is the thing we are to study and apply. The point in the parable is the object he sets before him, and the care with which he arranges the minuter points that are needful to the execution of his plan. He wants an earthly home, and is working for earthly ends. We want a heavenly home, an eternal habitation; are working for eternity, not for time. Do as he did, is the Saviour's meaning. Count nothing too small, too trivial. He made eternal things and eternal laws bend to this passing want; do you make all things earthly bend to this eternal aim. Do not imagine that the little things of life have nothing to do with the great and eternal. Nothing is small with eternity before us. In the eye of God, in the effect produced, in the everlasting result, there is nothing small: for "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

I.—*Let us notice the contrast which Christ here draws.*

Small and great are really comparative terms. As a rule, we ourselves form very different estimates of the same thing at different times. A thing on which

we have set our heart grows with the desire, and increases in magnitude, so long as it is only an object of desire; but when once possessed, it dwindles as we tire of it, till in the end it looks very small. A duty in which we wish to take part, and a post we are eager to fill, gain immense importance so long as another occupies and shuts us out; though after a time, when other things allure and another post attracts us, it may lose all its worth, and we begin to regard as trivial what looked so momentous before. All that we eagerly desire, and whatever will help us to attain it, gains a fictitious worth; and things for which we have no taste lose even their proper value in our esteem. This was the case with the unjust steward. There was a time when he would not have stooped to such trivial matters as the casting up of a debtor's bill, and would have despised a place in one of his lord's debtors' homes. But now that he is homeless their homes are palaces, and the manipulation of their bills becomes a most momentous affair. Nothing is now too small for his notice if it will but help him to accomplish his end. In the focus of his purpose the smallest things are magnified, and everything becomes great in the light of his one desire. Things that will not help him, whatever their intrinsic worth, have no worth for him. He has but one end in view; everything is measured by that. Nothing is either great or small in itself, but everything is either great or small as it will or will not assist him to accomplish his end.

And on this the Saviour's lesson is based. In the first flush of excitement consequent upon their new position, and their eager longing for an everlasting home, there was great danger that the disciples would underrate the real worth of the things of this life, and, counting them small things, either fail to use them wisely, and overlook the good they enable us to do; or, treating them as things with which religion has nothing to do, hoard the mammon of unrighteousness instead of using it, till they become the servants of mammon themselves. And this, I think, is His first lesson. Eternal possessions are, indeed, of most momentous importance, and the things of this life are small in contrast. But they are not therefore insignificant. Their very relation to eternity makes them great. Your money, your time, your talents, these are great things; for on your faithful use of any one of these may depend the welcome you receive to the everlasting habitations. Be faithful, therefore, in your employment of even the least of these; and you will find at last that he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.

But the words point farther still. There is nothing really small. From our habit of measuring by feet or yards, and calling things great or small, according to the size, we get very much into the habit of estimating value according to apparent bulk. A small thing means a trivial thing, and a great thing one of great importance. Yet in reality no mistake could be

greater. There is nothing really small; size is but the condition in which a thing exists, not the thing itself. All the gas that fills a balloon was once condensed into a small shovelful of coal or a log of wood, and was far greater then than it is now, with all its stupendous bulk. Events that seem greater, and the works that strike the eye, are often far less effective than little deeds that no one sees. A drop of poison in its minutest form produces greater effects than when diluted and enlarged. Size, bulk, appearance, go for nothing in the universe of God. There is nothing really small.

And God Himself counts nothing small. Not only is the whole universe composed of atoms infinitesimally small, but these are all arranged with the minutest care. Everything that God does is performed with the most thoughtful attention to the very smallest things. The animalcule is created with as much care as the body of a man. The down is laid upon the wings of the tiniest moth with as much beauty and precision as the plumage of a parrot or a dove. The leaf of the smallest flower that lies hidden in the shades of the densest forest is painted with as exquisite beauty as the lily or the rose. And textures which only a microscope can show are woven with as much delicacy and care as the branches of a cedar or an oak. And this runs through all that is ever done by Him. The law which He gave to the Jews, and the instruction sent by prophets, alike taught this

lesson—there is nothing small to God. And the law embodied in the life of Christ taught just the same. His greatness and His divinity were not more conspicuous when He walked on the waves, raised the dead, or calmed the stormy ocean with a word, than when He talked to the woman of Samaria, made the widow's heart rejoice, or laid His loving hand upon the head of a child. It was His little deeds in which He shone. And what He did He taught to others, viz., to count nothing small. The one talent is not to be hidden; the careless words are not to be underrated as having no importance. The mustard-seed is not to be despised, nor the cup of cold water to be lightly esteemed. The one talent may bring glory to God, and eternal reward to those who use it for Him. The mustard-seed may grow; the idle words have all eternity on their wings; and the cup of cold water has everlasting fruit, according as it has been given or refused. There is nothing small. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

II.—*The rule which Christ here lays down.*

The words themselves may be understood as indicating either what a man will be or what he really is. He will be faithful if he has much; or God regards him now as being actually faithful in much. Whichever interpretation we prefer, they clearly suggest the following truths:—

1. Fidelity, not amount, is the real test of character. The importance attached to things according to magnitude often leads to a false estimate of both the performance and neglect of small things. If men perform great deeds, the air rings with applause, and newspapers are full of their praise; and when great duties are neglected or great crimes committed, none can be too loud in their censure. But little deeds are done with none to praise, and little sins committed with none to notice or blame; and yet as a test of character the one is of quite as much importance as the other. The stealing of a penny indicates a want of honesty as clearly as the stealing of a pound. He who tells the smaller lie is as evidently wanting in truthfulness as he who practises still greater frauds. We ourselves feel this. We lose confidence in a man who has cheated us once, however small the fraud may have been; and we never thoroughly believe those who have knowingly told us the smallest lie.

And this is no limited law. It is care in small things that always marks the trustworthy character and the great mind. The greatest artist paints the smallest features with as much care as those which are the first to strike the eye; and the greatest architect is as careful of the finish of what no eye but God beholds as of those which catch the eye of the admiring crowd. Their greatness is seen in their littleness: their conscientiousness in the goodness of what is hidden, and not merely in the finish of what is seen. We see it

in every-day life. We are all attracted by striking deeds ; yet we form our estimate of men not from the few great things they do, but from the little things they are doing and saying every day. And we see it in the Church. We may express our admiration of great talent and great deeds ; but it is, after all, the smaller things that affect us most, and on these we base our admiration or blame. And though sometimes our exaggerated applause makes it appear as though we only valued work that strikes the eye ; yet in reality we have a far higher esteem for faithful workers doing little things, than for those who only work when there is something great to do. And so has God. What He wants is fidelity, and that is a thing for every day. The man who does a great deed now and then, in the eye of God has done but little after all ; whilst real fidelity shown in the little things is to Him of worth as great as if we had been endowed with superior talent, and able to perform much greater deeds.

2. Fidelity, not amount, is the true measure of our Christian work.

" He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." The work of Christ is one. Though it stretches through all ages, covers all lands, is infinite in its variety and manifold in its agencies, it is but one work after all. And the true measure of every part is not what it is in itself, or what it would be

by itself, but what it is as part of this great whole. The multiplicity of its agencies is no division of its unity, and the proportionate worth of any one of these agencies it is utterly impossible to define. The magnitude and worth of any part are completely swallowed up in the grandeur and worth of the whole. It is always thus that we estimate the importance of the several parts of any large machine. When we pass through a factory filled from roof to basement with complicated machinery, we never think of valuing each separate portion by itself, and estimating its worth by the price it would fetch alone. The wheel may be small and valueless, the strap of trifling worth; but here they are parts of one great machine. Their worth is their relation to the whole, and the true value of each is the loss that would follow if either were damaged or destroyed. In relation to the whole, the least is sometimes the greatest, and that which would fetch the smallest price a thing of greatest worth. The wheels of a clock derive all their value from the perfection of the clock they are working. And every nerve and muscle of this body of ours, so fearfully and wonderfully made, possesses all its worth, not in the material of which it is composed, nor in the function it is fitted to perform, but in the fact that it performs this function as part of the body of a man. And so is it with the work we have to do. In itself, there is no work that we can do which has really much worth in itself. Relative proportion, dis-

tinction of great and small, sink to nothing—not in the worth of each, but in the actual insignificance of all. But as parts of the one great eternal work of Christ, they all rise into incalculable worth; all are great, and none can determine which is the greatest of the whole. And this is God's estimate of the work we do. He does not value it as a work alone, but as part of that greater and more perfect work, in which all works combine. The little that you do may be the least, small as the dewdrop that glitters in the sunlight, and then passes away. But the dewdrop itself is not merely a dewdrop; it is part of the glorious universe of God, twin brother to the sun, in whose beams it shines. Least and greatest are all one to Him. Your smallest work blends with the greatest; and in the eye of God, if comparison be possible, yours may be the greater of the two. For "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

3. Fidelity, not magnitude, is the ground of success. He *is* faithful also in much. The little becomes the great. Everything passes through its stage of apparent smallness. The spreading oak was once an acorn, and the mustard-tree the tiniest seed. Faithfulness in the sowing of the seed is faithfulness in the production of the tree. We can none of us produce trees full grown, or shape them after they have grown. But we can all sow the seed, and do something to shape

them while they are growing. The only way to be faithful in much is to be faithful in that which is least. And this is true of all Christian work. You cannot, perhaps, do great things, but you can do small things which will grow to great. You cannot mould or change the character of men; few, indeed, are able to do that; but you may form the character of a child, who will grow to be a man. You fancy, perhaps, as you gather your children round you in your classes or your homes, that it is but a small work you are doing after all. A small work? You are doing the greatest work in all the world. The power of the greatest orator who moves the masses at his will, and carries all before him with the resistless energy of his word, is not to be compared with that of the many noiseless teachers who are training the child in the way he should go. It is the noiseless engine that does the work, and the least that grows into the great. He that is doing little *is* doing much, if the little be faithfully accomplished and be but work that can grow. We never need be proud of the great things we do, nor should we ever despise them because they are small. The greatest is often a bubble that bursts, the smallest a seed that grows into a tree. Thus the little is great, and "he that is is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

We may apply it also to our general conduct in relation to all the affairs of this life. There is nothing

really small. We are in no danger of undervaluing the possessions of life, the business of life, or the honours of life in relation to ourselves; but we are in great danger of undervaluing their importance in relation to Christ and His kingdom. Their influence and worth are great indeed. The use we make of any of these has sometimes a far greater weight, and is followed by more momentous results, than the more direct work that we do for the spread of the gospel in the world. Your influence for good or evil is often greater in the shop or warehouse than ever it can be in the church. We never know which will tell with greatest power. The least is often the greatest, and so "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

We may apply it also to every department of Christian duty. But, above all, you must see its application to that which is chiefly engaging your attention to-day —the importance of *the Sunday-school*. We could hardly find a more striking illustration of the Saviour's words than that which the Sunday-school presents. The little has grown into much. Little could Raikes have imagined what a work he was doing when he first gathered a handful of children, and taught them on the Sunday to read the Bible. Had any one ventured to predict to what a giant the dwarf would grow, he would have been ready to reply, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might these things be." Yet the work has been done. The seed has grown into

a majestic tree. And the illustration is quite as striking if we consider the influence they have exerted and the work they actually do. I do not think that Sunday-school teachers, as a rule, form at all a correct estimate of the real importance of their work. It is too often looked upon as but a small work, to be taken up lightly and as lightly discarded. I am quite sure that I never knew the worth of Sunday-school teaching till I ceased to be a Sunday-school teacher. It was when I became the pastor of a church, and saw for myself how thoroughly the school is the nursery-ground for the church, and to how large an extent the increase of the church, the strength of the church, and the vitality and usefulness of the church, are dependent upon the Sunday-school, that I first began to comprehend their worth. Sunday-school teachers have, indeed, reason to magnify their office. When we make up the statistics of our churches, and see how our converts have been gathered in, we ministers have often cause to look up with thankfulness to the Sunday-school teacher for the fruit we reap from his labours. You sow the seed; we only come in to watch the plant and gather the harvest. You lead the children to Christ and bring them to us when they have already decided to follow the Lord. You cannot exaggerate the value of your work. Be faithful. Do not count it small. You are not without encouragement and honour from the church. You receive still greater honour from God. It is not a little work. But

if it were, there is no department of Christian labour of which it is more true, that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

And if teachers cannot form too high an estimate, much less can churches attach too much importance to their Sunday-schools. Their worth is growing every year, and will become far greater in the future than ever it has been in the past. The cry for education and the growing probability that the instruction given throughout the week will be secular alone, will force upon the churches of Christ the necessity to give all the efficiency possible to their Sunday-schools. And in this department of our Christian labour efficiency is sure to pay. The churches will be strengthened by the accessions they receive, society benefited by the religious instruction they impart. The race between good and evil, faith and infidelity, is terribly keen. Which shall gain the day, and what the consequent destiny of our colony shall be, will depend very much on the zeal and the fidelity with which the Christian churches fulfil their duty to the Lord, and the faithfulness with which the Gospel is preached through the length and breadth of the land ; but there is nothing which will contribute more largely to the result than the teaching in our Sunday-schools. None can tell the value of their work, or how much will be accomplished by the little they may do. The thing of all importance is to use with faithfulness what talents have been given, remembering that the one

may sometimes accomplish quite as much as the five. And whatever be accomplished, if we be but faithful, in the eye of God it will be all the same, and in our eternal reward the same; for "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

DIVINE JEALOUSY THE MEASURE OF DIVINE GRACE.

"*Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But He giveth more grace.*"—JAMES iv. 5, 6.

THERE are few passages that look more obscure and unpromising. Yet there are few that yield a richer result when once we get the key. This is often the case. Some of the finest thoughts lie hidden from the careless. The superficial reader may indeed find the surface of the Bible strewn with golden lore. But the thoughtful student will always find his hardest labour well repaid. Let him but crush the quartz, and he will find veins of purest gold within.

The difficulties connected with this passage arise in part from the condition and character of the persons addressed; in part from the impossibility of finding any such words as these in the Scripture; in part from the diversity of opinion as to the spirit referred to; but chiefly from our translation.

Is "the spirit that dwelleth in us" the spirit of evil or the Spirit of God? Most readers think the former. The reason for this is the character of the persons whom James had in his mind, and the feelings we in-

stinctively have, that the spirit dwelling in those who could deserve such epithets as he employs must be an evil spirit, and a very evil one indeed.

But on the other hand, James is here writing to a Christian church: a church fallen, corrupt, and in error, no doubt, but still a church. Not more in error than the churches at Galatia and Colosse; nor more corrupt than the church at Corinth. If, therefore, Paul did not hesitate to write to the Corinthians, "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you," there is no reason on that account why James should not write the same. The apostles never hesitated to do this in the case of any church which they addressed. Whatever might be its failings, and however sharply they reproved, they never scrupled to affirm that the promise of Christ was still in force: "He dwelleth with you and shall be in you." And however the spirit of evil might tempt a church, and force an entrance, if, in any sense of the word, it could be called a church of Christ, they would never say that the spirit which *dwelt* in the church was any other than the Spirit of God. And this did apply to those whom James was addressing. They were still "beloved brethren," having the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; and it is as to a Christian church that James writes to them here. In spite, therefore, of the fault he finds and the charges he brings against them, I have no hesitation in saying that the spirit referred to was the Spirit of God.

But how could he say that the Spirit of God "lusteth to envy"? The words have both of them an evil sound; and it was quite possible that our translators used the words because in their opinion it was an evil spirit that was intended here. But, on the other hand, they used the former of these two words in so much wider a sense than we do now, that they could employ it where we should never think of doing so. Covetousness, greediness, eager striving, are all included in their use of the word. So that the word may bear the sense of the most eager desire.

At any rate, this is the meaning of the word which James employs. It occurs in many other passages of the New Testament, and always in the simple sense of longing or intense desire. "I long to see you." "How greatly I long after you in the bowels of Christ." "Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." In all these passages the same word is used; and there is not a single passage in the New Testament where the word is used in any other than the good sense of longing, or of earnest desire. Why, then, should this one passage form an exception, and the ugly word "lust" be forced in? There is no reason whatever; and the words need mean nothing more than that the Spirit which dwelleth in us is not a cold, unfeeling Spirit, but a warm, loving, earnest Spirit; the Spirit that dwelleth in us longeth, and that with most intense desire. But longeth for what? For you: that He may have your

whole heart, that His love may be requited; that there may be no corner reserved for another, no place from which He is excluded. He longs for a monopoly of love.

There is still the word *envy*, however, of which we have to dispose. This also has a questionable sound. Yet envy is not always wrong. In all probability it generally is so; but there are times and circumstances in which it is blameless and right. If another holds what we ought to possess, what rightfully belongs to us, and what we have a perfect right to recover, then envy is not wrong. The attempt to recover stolen property, to regain possession of a conquered territory, to get back a throne which has been usurped by force, no one would condemn; and the envy that prompts to the effort cannot be worse than the deed. And if the territory lost should be another's heart, the throne usurped the command of another's affections, the treasure stolen another's esteem and love, we have surely the right to use all means to recover these, and envy of the successful aggressor cannot be wrong. Now this, I think, is the meaning here. You did once admit the rightful claim of Christ to be the sole possessor of your love. You gave yourself to Him as a bride to her husband, and the throne of your heart was His alone. But now, how is all this changed! The friendship of the world is becoming far dearer to you than all the love of Christ. You are letting the world rob Him of His possessions, and drive Him

from His throne. "Adulterers and adulteresses," you are imitating the infidelity of your fathers, and have become faithless to your rightful and once honoured Lord.

But where does the Scripture say "The Spirit that dwelleth in you lusteth to envy"? There is no such passage in either the Old Testament or the New. Commentators have searched diligently, but have failed to find it. Some have even gone to the Apocrypha. But you cannot find it there. Great ingenuity has, therefore, been displayed in fixing upon some particular passage which James had in his mind. but with no better result. Yet surely there need be no great difficulty. The very fact that there is no such passage only proves that he had not any single passage in his mind. Do you ask where does the Scripture say this? The answer is, Everywhere. There are few things more prominent than the jealousy of God. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God" were words that were perpetually ringing in the Jewish ear. "They provoked Him to jealousy" was a repeated complaint. Psalmists recorded how "they moved Him to jealousy with their graven images"; and by the mouth of prophets God Himself declared, "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." If the spirit that dwelleth in us is the Spirit of God, the whole Scripture declares that He is not satisfied with half a heart, that He cannot bear estrangement or tolerate a rival, and that from the

very warmth of His affection "the Spirit that dwelleth in us longeth even to jealousy."

Look, then, first of all at—

I.—*The conduct which had excited the jealousy of the Spirit of God.*

The persons addressed were all professedly Christians. They had confessed their faith, had been baptized, and were members of the Church of Christ. They had thus consecrated themselves to the Lord, and His vows were upon them. Such consecration and vows included not merely the acceptance of Christ as their Saviour, but the reception of Christ into their warmest affections, the offering of their hearts, and the devotion of their lives. These vows they had failed to perform.

Many of them had fallen into the common evil of mistaking a cold creed for earnest faith. Some of them either lived exactly as they had done before, or had fallen through false confidence into still greater sins. Cold-hearted, they had no sympathy with the widow, no care for the orphan. Proud and destitute of the Spirit of Christ, they were all obsequious to the rich, but looked with contempt upon the poor; their very meetings were the occasion for unseemly class distinctions, and a gold ring received more honour than Christian worth in humble garb. Puffed up by their little knowledge, there were no learners in their assembly, but all thought themselves apt to teach; and

so forward were all to be teachers of others, that the Spirit of God found none searching for truth or willing to be led. The effects of this self-conceit were apparent in ungoverned temper and its usual attendant evil words; and wrangling, contention, and strife were common scenes at all the meetings of the church. The honour that cometh from God was not half so important in their estimation as standing well with the world; and the friendship of the world had become the first object of desire. In their daily life God was altogether forgotten, and plans for the future were all made without the slightest reference to Him. And, to crown the whole, the love of riches was not even modified by their religion; so that in the church itself there were men to be found who in their thirst for riches were treasuring up, as it were, fire for the last day. Mammon, selfishness, pride, self-conceit, and the world were the rivals that had thus excited the jealousy of the Spirit of God.

It was this which drew out from St. James such burning words of severe reproof. Like an Old Testament prophet, he denounced with fierce indignation their unfaithfulness and treachery. He saw the sin of the fathers repeated in the children; and, adopting the very language of the prophets, addressed them without reserve as "adulterers and adulteresses," because they had thus proved unfaithful to their Lord, and sacrificed the love of God to the friendship of the world. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses," know ye not

that the world's friendship is God's enmity? Whoever, then, desires to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do ye think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit that dwelleth in us longeth even to jealousy?" Do you for a moment suppose that God Himself is unconcerned about all this, and that the Scripture does not mean what it says, when it declares so plainly and emphatically the jealousy of God?

Are these all things of the past? Would that they were! The times have changed; churches are more numerous; the name of Christian is more widely spread; the profession of Christianity is far more general; but the evils which James denounced are not yet rooted out.

Still are there those within all our churches who give Christ their hearts apparently with all sincerity and warmth, and retain their place amongst His followers, but leave their first love. They do not fall out of the ranks, are not cut off from His church; they are neither apostates nor open deniers of the faith; but others have stolen away their affections from Christ, and usurped the place that belonged to Him.

Still are there far too many to be found on whom their religion has exerted no softening or subduing influence, and who give no evidence whatever of the love or spirit of the meek, the loving, and the lowly Christ. Puffed up with spiritual pride, too full of self-conceit to admit that they have anything to learn, always laying down the law for others, or announcing,

with great swelling words of vanity, their own opinions as infallible truth, they all set up as masters, teachers, none as learners ; and the Spirit that guides into all the truth finds that they have left Him nothing to do. Faith in self has taken the place of faith in Christ ; and the love of self fills all the heart in which the love of Christ should reign supreme.

There are not wanting those who show nothing whatever of that "pure religion and undefiled" which is the best evidence of the love of Jesus. Hard, cold icebergs, they spread a chill wherever they go. Unloving, uncharitable, unkind, they have locked out the love of Christ, and only let in the cold, freezing creed ; and in them the widow and fatherless find no sympathy.

Yes, and in nearly every church, if we would search diligently, perhaps if we would search our own hearts, we should find some over whom the spirit of the world has far more influence than the Spirit of God. To stand well with the world is their constant, though sometimes unconscious, desire. What will the world say ? is their tacit but daily inquiry. Respectability is more than religion, and good opinion better than a good conscience. The Word of God may be the Bible they read, but custom is the Bible they study and observe. In a word, the world's friendship has become indispensable, whether the friendship of God be retained or not. They try to divide their allegiance, but fail. The world's friendship is God's enmity, and they only excite the jealousy of the Lord.

And still are there some whom diligence in business and success in business have not only placed in the ranks of rich men, but whose riches are corrupted and their "gold and silver cankered." The love of Christ, if admitted at all, is only an occasional visitant, and never a welcome guest now. To climb the world's ladder is their great ambition, even though the top thereof reacheth anywhere but to heaven. To accumulate, not to distribute, is the *summum bonum* of existence; and they pay no heed to the fact that getting, without proportionate giving, may be only treasuring up, as it were, fire. Gain is the synonym for most of *their* godliness. The world is now in their hearts, and Christ is nowhere. They have broken their plighted vows. Infidelity is the only name that their treatment of Him deserves. They still keep His name for their own credit's sake. But another has won all their affection, and He receives none of the old warm greeting when He knocketh at the door.

And to all such false lovers and half-disciples do these words apply. Think not that Christ is indifferent to all this, and does not care for the change. Indifferent? He is most jealous. The loss of His people's love inflicts on His heart the severest wound. And with earnest, piteous look He still turns round to those who have not gone, and says, "Will ye also go away?" Jealousy is the very law of His nature. He cannot bear to lose a soul, or lose the love of a single disciple. He is a jealous Lord. Longing for our

affections with most intense desire; jealous of everything that really draws our heart away; "the Spirit that dwelleth in us longeth even to jealousy."

II.—*The earnest longing out of which this jealousy springs.*

Even jealousy is a word too exclusively used in a sinister or evil sense to be suggestive of anything Divine. This, no doubt, arises from the fact that human jealousy is for the most part an evil thing, and its root pure selfishness. When I see another carry off a prize for which I competed, but which he justly won through superior merit or greater diligence, if at such a moment feelings of jealousy fill my heart, however natural, it is reprehensible and wrong. Or when I see another rising, by his own good conduct, to greater esteem, affection, and honour than I am ever able to secure, if from mere jealousy I long to see him sink that I may rise, such jealousy is Satanic rather than Divine. Wherever jealousy or envy is nothing but the fruit of a spirit that grudges to another that to which it has itself no rightful claim, and cherishes malignity as though it were wronged, in this there is nothing but sin.

But should a mother see another stealing away by insidious arts the affections of her children who are even dearer than life, and whose love fills her heart with purest joy, till one by one they treat her coldly and go to seek elsewhere a mother's love, and she is left alone—would not her jealousy be right and good?

The very longing for their love, from which it sprang, would make her jealousy almost Divine. Or should a wife, who had been long accustomed to her husband's undivided love, awake some day to the terrible consciousness that she was no longer what she had been once, that another had usurped her place, stolen away the affections that were once all her own, and that nothing was left to her but the mere name of love, would not jealousy be the most righteous thing under the sun? Jealousy must be proportioned to the intensity of the love, when its object has been stolen away, and it mourns a loss far worse than death. Such jealousy is pure, unselfish, and Divine.

And such is the source of the jealousy of God. It is not the mere love of power in which it has its roots. All that power can effect God could easily secure. He who brought the flood upon the ungodly, burned up Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire, and drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, can suffer no loss that power could repair. But power will never reconquer love; and it is from loss of this that all His jealousy springs. He loves with perfect love. And out of that deep affection that redeemed you, invited you, made infinite sacrifices to secure you, yes, wooed you and won you, there springs the holiest and intensest jealousy when another is allowed to steal your heart away. The earnest longing of the Spirit is revived: and the Spirit that still dwelleth in you longeth even to jealousy.

But can we trace more particularly the way in which this jealousy of the Spirit is aroused? I think we can. James shows it plainly enough. The Spirit of God had been given to the church as the spirit of truth, the spirit of charity, the spirit of joy, and the spirit of true riches. His guidance had been accepted, and He had taken possession of their souls. But selfishness, conceit, love of the world, and love of money had so stolen their hearts, that He could only long for what had once been His own. And it is so still. The rivals are various, the rivalry and the jealousy are still the same.

Some are drawn away by intellectual pursuits. The Spirit of God is given to lead us into all truth. Many a field of study lies before us, and none is prohibited —in none will He refuse His aid. But the Bible is His chosen field, and to show us the things of Christ the great purpose for which He is given. Yet how many there are for whom the Bible has lost all its freshness, and the study of Christ all its charms! Is this true of you? Do you read the Bible with no interest now, and see no charm in the life of your Lord? Have you given all your soul to other studies, and do you seek all other knowledge with a zest with which you never seek a fuller knowledge of Christ? Then truly, whatever your studies or your reading may be, they have estranged your hearts from the Bible and from Christ, and the Spirit is jealous of you.

Sometimes it is our love of pleasure that arouses His jealousy. Religion is no enemy to enjoyment. God, who is called the happy God, is ever diffusing the happiness of His own nature. He has given to every one of His creatures great capacities for pleasure, and filled every portion of the world He has made with delights in infinite variety. It is not our seeking for happiness or our hearty enjoyment of pleasure that excites His jealousy. But there is a love of pleasure that leaves no room for the love of God. There is an unhealthy craving for excitement, an incessant thirst for amusement, which destroys all taste for serious thought, leaves neither time nor inclination for the duties of religion, and from its very nature and its undue indulgence invariably ends in stealing the heart away from God. He provides for His people the richest and purest joys. But if these have satiated, and you have lost all relish for pursuits in which once you found your greatest delight—if you have really become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God—then He looks with longing at the affections He has lost, and the Spirit is jealous of you.

Sometimes it is business that estranges. A diligent pursuit of business is not only right, but a constant duty. God has not only given to most men capacities for business and taste for business, but has made it one of the necessities of our existence. And while there is nothing hostile to religion in commercial pursuits, there is nothing at variance with eminent piety

in the closest attention to business and the most assiduous efforts to ensure success. The best men of business are very often the best workers in the church and the holiest men of God. But, on the other hand, there are very many in whom devotion to business is the only kind of devotion of which they seem capable now. They hunger and thirst, but it is not after righteousness. To get on in the world is of far more importance than to make any progress in the church Prosperity has called a new passion into being, of far greater force than all the love of God that was ever shed abroad in their hearts. They live, but it is not for God ; they work, but it is never for His kingdom now ; they love, but God is not the possessor of their affection ; and the only fear they have before their eyes is the fear of losses, not the fear of God. Is this in any measure the spirit that is creeping over you ? Are the claims of business making you indifferent to the claims of God ? Are you finding less satisfaction in the worship of God, less inclination for the work of God, less heart for the Word of God ? Does business now satisfy all those cravings and wants which at one time were satisfied with nothing short of God ? In a word, are you so absorbed in business that you can really do without worship, without religion, without God ? Then, whatever you were, you have allowed another to rob God of the love that He claims and the heart that once was His, and the Spirit is jealous of you.

This, then, is the jealousy of God. Not the poor, petty jealousy of selfishness, but the ardent jealousy of intensest love. He longeth because He loveth; He does not grudge your love for others; He cares not how many your heart embraces in its affections, or over what range your love extends. The love of God expands the heart, and by this we know that we love God. For "if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us; and this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God loveth his brother also." But if the love of others draw our hearts away from Him, He cannot be indifferent: He is, because He loves, a jealous God.

III.—*The grace which follows the jealousy.*

"He giveth more grace." Few demands seem harder to satisfy than the demand of God for perfect love. When we read the words "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength," we are inclined to say, "It is absolutely impossible." And so it really is. God never confines Himself to possibilities. He always asks more than we can perform. The mark is intentionally placed beyond our reach. The ideal is too perfect for man to realise. The burden is heavier than we can bear, and the task greater than we can accomplish. God always requires impossible things; things as impossible as it was for Moses to divide the Red Sea with his rod, for the Israelites to

blow down the walls of Jericho with their rams'-horns, or for the disciples to feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. And why does He make such excessive demands? That His strength may be made perfect in weakness; that He may give what He requires; that He may help us to do all that He commands. "He giveth more grace." The measure of His requirements is the measure of His aid. He who said to the paralysed, "Take up thy bed and walk," and gave immediate strength to do so, and He who, when the prophet pleaded, "O Lord, I cannot speak," put forth His hand, and touched His mouth and said, "Behold my words are in thy mouth," may ask impossibilities, but by His grace He will make that easy which was impossible before.

And if it be hard at first to love with all the heart, it is harder still when the heart has wandered. Will He meet this greater need? He might help us to love; but when we have been unfaithful, does He care enough to recover the love that was lost, to help a backslider to return? Yes, still He giveth more grace. In proportion to His jealousy is His readiness to aid. Man might not do this. It would be human to despise the love that held so loosely, and in proportion to the love that had been wounded and wronged, to hate the rival and the false one too. It is far otherwise with God. This is human, not Divine. His jealousy burns when our love is estranged, but He giveth more grace to help our return. He seems to lavish His gifts on

the wanderer, to keep him in mind of the depths of His love ; and when the wanderer returns, nothing is too good for Him to bestow. Earth brightens in the light of His presence ; life is enriched with abundant blessings ; the valley of the shadow of death is illumined with the glory of His countenance, and eternity is flooded with the sunshine of His love. As if to convince the wanderer of his welcome, and assure him of His undying love, He giveth more grace.

These words ought to convince us of—

1. The necessity for constant vigilance.

We are all in danger of exciting the jealousy of God. If it were always wrong things, actual sin, that turned the heart away, there would not be half the danger. But "we perish by permitted things." It is the excess of right that does the greatest mischief in the world. Let the centrifugal force which keeps the whole universe in order, as globe revolves around globe in perfect harmony, be increased by however small a quantity, and every orb would leave its place, and the whole universe become a fearful scene of chaotic confusion and ruin. The smallness of the deflection is no diminution of the harm ; nay, it sometimes increases it by hiding the danger. The flower has begun to fade before we notice that its freshness has gone ; the light is dimmed before we discern the gathering mist ; the poison has entered the blood long before the burning fever is visible in the cheek.

"It is the little rift within the lute,
That by-and-by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

"The little rift within the lovers' lute,
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

Our dangers spring from business, home, studies, reading, amusement, and whatever else can monopolise our interest, or draw our heart away from God. Here is the weak point in our armour. Here let our watchfulness be.

2. The object at which we have to aim.

Of all the processes connected with the building and fitting out of a vessel, none can surpass, perhaps none equal, in importance the adjusting of the compasses. The timber may be good, the lines perfect, the rigging without a flaw; but let some unnoticed attraction deflect the compass or render it untrue, and however small the deflection, there is no calculating the disaster to which it may lead. And in all the needful preparations for the voyage of life none can equal the adjusting of the heart. God wants it to point true to Him, not for His own sake only, but for ours also. On this our highest interests depend. He is jealous of whatever attracts so strongly as to render it untrue. He envies not the pleasures you enjoy. He Himself supplies the sources and creates the taste; but if they shut Him out, and you become lovers

of pleasure more than lovers of God, His jealousy rises in a moment, and the Spirit of God is jealous of you. He does not grudge you the delight with which you roam amidst the fields of knowledge, the creations of poetry, or the wonders of art; but if these become your idol, the object of exclusive love, and God is forgotten or forsaken, then again He is jealous of you. He has no wish to see you less diligent in your business, less anxious for prosperity, less pleased with the progress you make in the world; but if the pursuits of life, however proper, rob Him of the time, the thought, the love He ought to receive, there is good ground for His jealousy, and the Spirit of God is jealous of you.

Look, then, lastly, at—

3. The honour conferred.

It may look at first like an excessive demand. But when we know that this demand for our love is nothing but a desire for our happiness and welfare, that it is just because our love to Him is the best channel for His grace that He would keep it open and keep it all, it becomes the greatest honour. The jealousy of God is truly the glory of man. He is jealous, only because he would save us from the power of every destroyer, would keep us in safety by His own side, and have us for ever in His eternal home. He grudges the world every heart that it allures, and Satan every soul that he destroys. With His own burning love

He seeks us, and is ever saying, "Give me thy heart."

Is this too much to ask? Would you rather not have so jealous a God? Would you feel it to be an honour to know that He cared nothing at all for your love, that it did not matter to Him whether you loved Him or not, that He was perfectly indifferent, and therefore felt no jealousy, however He might be slighted and forgotten? Surely this is not what any man would desire. His jealousy is the offspring of His truest love, and the highest honour that He could confer. And the demand is not excessive. With our contracted hearts, He will not get much love when He gets it all; and our best will be but a poor return for all that we have received. With love unquenchable He has loved us; with compassion that spares no sacrifice He has sent His Son to save us; with earnest longing that cannot give up its object He has continued seeking us; and with loving jealousy He sees another step in and lead us to destruction. We can make at best but a poor return for this constant and undying love; yet let us make the best we can: nothing will repay it.

> "Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so Divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all."

ST. BARNABAS AND THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH.

"*Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch; who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*" — ACTS xi. 22, 23.

THE importance of Antioch in the history of the Church has not been surpassed by that of any other city in the world. It was not only the first city in which a Gentile church was planted, the first place in which the disciples received the name of Christians, but it was the city in which missions to the heathen really originated, and was the starting-point of the apostle Paul in all his missionary tours. The apostles and Christians at Jerusalem had just received the unexpected tidings that there was a Christian church already formed in that celebrated city. No intelligence could have been more surprising. They had sent no one; they did not even know that any one had gone. The work was clearly taken out of their hands. They had not done it, and they did not interfere. All that they did was to get Barnabas to go, that they

might learn how the matter really stood. "And when he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

I.—*What Barnabas saw.*

"The grace of God." The grace of God is constantly employed for the effects produced by the preaching of the Gospel, not only in the conversion of sinners, but in those gifts with which the reception of the Gospel was accompanied. That such gifts existed in the church at Antioch is evident from the fact stated afterwards, that there were both "prophets and teachers" there.

Here, then, in the very centre of heathenism, the sight which struck the eye of Barnabas was not merely a handful of believers, but a flourishing Christian church, endowed with all those spiritual gifts which had distinguished the church at Jerusalem, and had borne such manifest witness to the power of the Spirit of God.

Here, without the intervention of any of the apostles or recognised leaders of the Church, without even their cognisance, there had grown up a church whose prosperous condition bore the strongest testimony that, however little there might have been of the plan and purpose of man, there had been all the more of the power of God.

Here, before the Church and its heads had made

up their minds about the reception of Gentiles into the Church, God Himself had broken down the walls, and had taken the decision of the question out of their hands. And while they were quite unable to decide how the Gospel was to be carried through the world, all at once they received tidings that the work was being done, and far away, in the very best centre of all the world, there was already not only a flourishing church, but the very church by which the work would eventually be accomplished.

And "the grace of God" was also seen in the way in which the Gospel had been conveyed. The disciples had received a clear commission to "go into all the world." They were to begin at Jerusalem, but not to stay there; the Gospel was to be proclaimed in Judæa, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. The day of Pentecost was a glorious commencement. Three thousand were converted, and the number was doubled before long. Here, then, was a grand reservoir of power! What could not such a body of men accomplish? A very short time would suffice for their instruction in the apostles' doctrine, and they could then at once disperse and evangelise the world. Yet, strange to say, they did nothing of the kind. Philip went to Samaria, and was followed by Peter and John, but this was all that was done. Want of activity soon begat its usual results—internal division and strife. They began to contend about the widows' fund; and in that first church unworthy

jealousies usurped the place of enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel. Apparently the world would have to wait very long for the Gospel if it waited for the church at Jerusalem to move. What was the cause of the delay? Were they looking for fresh instructions, or expecting a new revelation? We cannot tell. But it was probably just as well that they waited as they did. Had the church at Jerusalem moved of its own accord, its actions would very likely have been hampered by officialism, and apostolical succession would assuredly have been thought essential to salvation.

God took the matter into His own hands. He sent before long what effectually dispersed the church, not a new revelation but a persecution. And now, no sooner were the disciples scattered abroad and freed from the restraint of Jerusalem, than the desire to preach was kindled in their hearts, and they went everywhere preaching the Gospel.

There is nothing strange or exceptional in this. The dying zeal of many a prosperous church "at ease in Zion" has been awakened by the shock of persecution, or some other visitation from the Lord. The activity of the Church has been evoked again and again by the fiery trials through which it has passed; and whilst to all appearance the world would wait long enough for the spontaneous zeal of the Church, God has repeatedly shown His independence of the Church, not by working without means, but by taking

some unofficial and unnoticed messenger, and sending him to the Gentiles. The grace of God may be neglected, but cannot be restrained. Though He will never do His work in any other way than through the agency of His servants, He will never allow His cause to stand still because of the negligence of those through whom the work should be done. Apostles may fail to go to the Gentiles, but a Gentile church shall nevertheless be founded, though it be by men unauthorised and unordained.

II.—*The gladness which he felt.*

"When he saw the grace of God he was glad." There was evidently a reason for recording this. It might indeed be said that a good man could hardly fail to be glad. In one sense this is true. The apostles at Jerusalem were glad when the three thousand were converted; Philip was glad when the Samaritans believed; and Peter and John when they brought down upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost. But here is a work with which Barnabas himself has had nothing to do. How will he feel? Will he be jealous that while the disciples at Jerusalem have been waiting the work has been done altogether without them? Will he try to find out some defect, that he may prove the necessity for their intervention? Will he endeavour to persuade the Christians at Antioch that, notwithstanding all that has been done, they had better send for the apostles and connect

themselves with the true Church? Will he depreciate what the grace of God has done, that he may show how much more a proper connection with the mother church at Jerusalem and an unquestionable apostolical succession would ensure? Will he not at least advise the elders to go to Jerusalem for a more regular ordination? This is what he would have done if he had lived in a later age. The church of Rome is ever saying to those who are separated from her, "No matter what you accomplish, you cannot have the true Spirit of God outside our pale." And it is no rare thing for other churches to give expression to pity, at least, for those who are not within their lines, and, though utterly unable to deny the grace of God in the work they perform, to keep the exploded fiction of true succession ringing in their ears. But why speak of others? It is never an easy thing to rejoice with all our heart in success with which we have had nothing to do, and the effect of which is rather to diminish our importance, and apparently to throw us into the shade. Yet here is a noble example; and while the apostles deserve all honour for the way in which they let the work alone, Barnabas stands out pre-eminently from the fact that he felt no jealousy, expressed no suspicion, and, without the least reserve, threw all his sympathies into what was obviously the work of God. We can hardly estimate all that is expressed in these words. It is so natural to believe that ours is the only way; to feel alarmed, suspicious, doubtful,

when any new path is struck out and good is done in ways of which we have never heard before. Irregularity so invariably excites alarm. The disposition to wish all to "follow with us" is so strong, and doubt of any new line so natural, that it indicates a spirit not only in advance of his age, but rarely met with in any age, that Barnabas so heartily rejoiced.

Yet how much there was to inspire him with gladness! Here was the solution of the great problem of those times—how to get the Gospel to the Gentiles, and bring the Gentiles within the Church. Here, too, was the visible proof that God can overcome the Church's difficulties by means of the very difficulties themselves. The persecution that arose about Stephen had been to all appearance the greatest disaster that could befall the Church. What hope could there be now of its accomplishing its great work in the world? The explanation was soon supplied, for the Church was saved and its work accomplished through the very things which threatened its destruction.

And here was the brightest promise of a glorious future. The city in which the Gospel had taken such root was the finest centre that could have been selected. The commerce of the East passed through it, merchants and travellers between the two continents kept up a constant stream that poured through Antioch from east to west, and west to east. The slow movements of men had been all outstripped by the work of God. And here was a Gentile church equipped with

all the resources that wealth, position, and social influence could supply, and ready at once to enter with heart and soul into the true missionary work of the Church of Christ. Little did Barnabas think as he travelled northward, prepared, no doubt, to uphold the due authority of the church at Jerusalem either by laying his own hands upon the heads of the Christians, or sending for the apostles to preserve the true succession, that the order would be reversed, and that he himself would receive ordination from the elders of a Gentile church. Yet so it was. Before very long the hands of Gentile Christians, on whose heads no apostle's hands had ever been laid, were placed upon the heads of Barnabas and Saul, to ordain them to the missionary work to which the Lord had called them. From that strange and at first incomprehensible church went forth the Gospel that covered the world. So that it is not in Jerusalem, nor yet in Rome, but in Antioch that we have to seek for the true founder of Christian missions and the mother of all the Gentile churches throughout the world.

III.—*The exhortation which he gave.*

"He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." This was all that he could do. So perfect was the work, so healthy did all appear, that he could point out no defect and suggest no change. The exhortation which he did give, however, was both sound and important.

1. He exhorted them to cleave unto the Lord.

There was no symptom at present that the church was declining in this respect. At Jerusalem as well as Antioch a living Saviour and a present Saviour was the object of the Church's faith, and the source of all its light and love. But the day was not far off when Christ would give place to creeds and sacraments, when a living priesthood would displace a living Saviour, and when the Church would gradually lose its hold of the Head. At Antioch the battle had yet to be fought: circumcision or faith, the law or the Gospel, Moses or Christ? And whether Barnabas foresaw it or not, his advice was equally sound: "Whatever you let go, hold fast by Christ; of whatever you relax your grasp, cleave unto the Lord." And this is still the advice we need. With our restless activity within and without the Church, our study and our work, our controversies and our creeds, there is perpetual danger that we should drift away from Christ Himself. We may work for our respective churches, defend our several opinions, perfect our different societies, till we end by cleaving to everything except to Christ. And yet, if the Church of Christ is to live, if its power is to be felt, if its triumphs are to be secured, the source of all its spiritual energy and the foundation of its ultimate success will not be the tenacity with which it has clung to creeds, or the perfection to which it has elaborated its machinery, but simply the fidelity, and love, and zeal with which

in all its several sections, it ever continues to cleave unto the Lord.

2 He also exhorted them to cleave with purpose.

This is something more than earnest cleaving. No doubt the cleaving itself must be the object of a definite purpose, if we are not to drift away. But it is also necessary that there should be a purpose beyond the cleaving; in other words, that we should retain our hold of Christ, with the firm and consistent purpose of getting strength from Him to do His work.

Barnabas had already seen at Jerusalem a church without a purpose; and he had seen enough to convince him that, however earnest such a church might be in listening to the apostles' doctrine, breaking bread and prayers, the want of purpose would be sure to let in dissension, and produce division in the end. And having seen both the danger and the necessity there, he urged with all the greater earnestness, "Let there be no want of purpose here." His words fell happily on sympathetic hearts; and he himself was sent with Paul to carry out the highest purpose that any church can set before it—to send the Gospel throughout the world. And they bore rich fruit both without and within. Without: for Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece received the Gospel from their hands, and the poverty of the church at Jerusalem was relieved from the abundance of Antioch. Within: for no dissensions racked the church, and no errors found an entrance

there. Stedfastly did it maintain its unity when the sowers of discord scattered the first seeds of schism, and division was safely warded off by simply cleaving to Christ with purpose of heart.

And if it be too late to avoid division now, and separation has grown into a law, this will at any rate prevent its going further, and gradually draw us together again. Two things alone can split a church: want of common purpose, and loss of Christ. And two things alone can preserve a church in unity, or restore the scattered fragments to cohesion again: a firmer hold of Christ, binding us together through our closeness to Him, and a stronger consciousness that in all our several sections our purpose is one: in other words, "cleaving to Christ with purpose of heart."

And the law of the Church is the law of every life. To be in Christ is the one thing needful for us all; to cleave to Christ, the only source of growth, and strength, and joy; to live and work for Christ, the way to do His will and earn the crown. The two should never be separated. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Some work for others till their own vineyard is barren; some nurse their own piety till others perish from starvation. Be it yours to keep a healthier way. Let your religion inspire activity, and all your activity be the outflow of your religion. "Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart."

PROFIT AND LOSS.

"Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."—MATTHEW xiii. 12.

CHRIST had just commenced His favourite custom of teaching in parables. He had never done this before. His disciples had been with Him for some time, but He had not made use of parables when teaching them. All that He had to say He had spoken plainly. His disciples are curious to know why such a distinction should be made. And Jesus answers the question without reserve. "It has been given to you to know the hidden things of the kingdom, but to them it has not been given. And therefore I speak in parables; for, Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." Christ, you see, does two things here. He tells them that the difference in His mode of teaching was occasioned by a difference in the persons hearing. He also lays down, in a kind of proverb, this universal law. He probably threw it into this proverbial form that it might be more easily remembered. He repeated it on two other occasions, after the parables of the talents

and the pound, in order that they might not forget it. He wanted it to get firm hold. Having is the rule of receiving. They who *have* will always get more. They who *have not* will lose what they have. Everything about it was designed to make it stick the faster. The very paradox was introduced for the same purpose: "He who has not, loses what he has." It must be not only a truth, but a most important truth, a truth for all time, a truth that all ought to know, and that ought to have a most important influence upon all our lives. True having the secret of getting; the only way to keep what we have.

I.—*Let us try and explain the real meaning of the words.*

When we read the words for the first time, it appears as though Christ means to say that He has only come into the world to enrich those who are already wealthy, and to impoverish those who are poor; to give more to those who already have, and to take away the little left to those who have lost their all: in other words, to make the learned and the righteous wiser and better, the ignorant and unrighteous more ignorant and more wicked still.

Now if this were the meaning there would be an end to the preaching of the Gospel. No missionary would have the least encouragement to carry the Gospel to the heathen. No preacher would have any warrant to offer salvation to the lost. We should none of us

have any hope of coming to the light, for we all begin in darkness. And having no righteousness to begin with, we should end with even less than we began.

Moreover, such a meaning would be quite opposed to the whole spirit of the Saviour's mission, and defeat the very purpose for which He came. He came to give liberty to the captive, sight to the blind, health to the sick, light to those that sat in darkness, life to the dead, righteousness to the sinful, and salvation to the lost. He came to bestow upon men what they did not possess, and not to give them more of what they already had; not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Again: It would be quite opposed to the command He gave to His own disciples, and to the work they actually performed. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The very words command them to carry to men what they do not possess, and not to seek out those who have a little light and give them more. And they did this. They went to heathen, however benighted, to sinners, however depraved, and proclaimed to them, as within their reach, salvation through Jesus Christ.

And in fact such a meaning would be opposed to what Christ Himself was doing here. Why did He teach these people in parables? Why, indeed, was He teaching them at all? Was it to keep them in ignorance, or to help them to the truth? The whole object of His teaching was to help them to learn, to

stimulate thought and inquiry, and to make them, like His own disciples, possessors of the truths that were hidden then. He does not mean, These people know nothing, therefore I shall teach them nothing; but, They have not got hold of the first principles yet. If through My parables they get hold of these, and make them their own, then I shall lead them on to more; but if they will not hear and think and lay hold of these simple truths, they will go further and further off, till all their light is turned into darkness.

The whole meaning of the words turns, then, upon what the Saviour Himself regarded as really *having*. And this He throws light upon in the parable of the pound. The servants of a nobleman received every one a pound, to trade with till their lord returned. One made it ten, another five; another kept it hidden and brought it back as he received it; he kept it safely, but he made no use of it. And in His sentence Christ quotes these words: "Take it from him; for he that *hath not*, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." There, then, the whole plan is plain. In one sense they all had the same; but there was a great difference in the nature and reality of their possession. One had it so thoroughly that he turned it into ten; one had it less thoroughly, still he had it, and turned it into five. The other *did not have it at all*. He seemed to have it, but he might as well have had a stone. True having is right using; it is getting the thing itself so truly into our possession that we

make just that use of it for which it has been bestowed. A man may have been born in the midst of light, and born with eyes to see. Let him keep his eyes open, and as he walks through the world he will be ever able to drink in from the glories of Creation, and the ever-changing scenes that pass before him, stores of knowledge, germs of thought, that will enrich his mind and expand his heart, and "to him that hath will be given;" but let him keep his eyes perpetually closed, and he will lose the very power of observation which he once possessed; yea, let him but bandage his eyes and he will lose his eyesight itself, and "from him that hath not will be taken away even that which he hath."

And here we come to the very scene of the Saviour's ministry. Around Him were His own disciples, not the twelve alone, but all who had already become His disciples. The whole nation was alike in the outward possession of religious privileges; the temple was there for all to visit; the priests sacrificed, the scribes taught, for all. The Bible was read in their hearing. The promises of God were impressed upon their minds. For "the Hope of Israel" all alike were taught to look, and watch, and pray. He came. Some used the light they had. They heard His voice, saw His works, and at once said, "This is He." The Bible had been no dead letter to them. The law had led them to Christ. They did possess it. They grasped its true meaning and spirit. Like sheep they

had come to Christ; and like a shepherd He was daily feeding them and leading them to green pastures. They had, and He gave them more. And in that vast crowd there were some who, though they had not come as yet, would thirst after righteousness and come. These parables were like the bait thrown out into that wild, boiling sea of wickedness and Pharisaic pride. Some would catch at the meaning of the words, let them into their hearts, get firm hold, and long for more. They would not long in vain. If they could but get this little, that would be *having*, and Christ would give them more. But some would mock, or catching sight of the truth cast it from them, or hearing the words never care for their meaning, or never let them reach their hearts, and draw to Christ and influence their lives. That would be no true having. They would lose all they had, lose Christ Himself, lose all their light, or lose what they all had then—the possibility of salvation.

Here, then, is the truth, as applicable to us as it was to them. We, too, have but to lay firm hold, with heart and soul, of the light that comes, and it will grow to perfect day; and, on the other hand, if we let all pass through the mind and never reach the heart, if we pay no heed to the light, do not walk in light, we shall lose the light, and learn in outer darkness the full meaning of the words, "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

II.—Let us look a little further at *The law which Christ here lays down.*

True having, the sure way to receiving; negligent having, the way to ruin.

This is not by any means a law of the Christian life alone. It is the law of all life. You all know the proverb, "Money makes money." It is the large proprietor who finds it easiest to add farm to farm; the capitalist who most easily increases his store. The more we learn, the easier it is to go on learning more. The man of talent goes on with rapid strides. The strong man finds it easiest to add to his strength. The more we do, the more we can do. In every department of life, as well as religion, "he that hath, to him is given."

But there is another side. Money does not always make money. Many an heir to property has died in poverty. There are large estates that, instead of growing, have fallen into waste. There are men of talent and education to be found as low as the unlearned and the fool. And there are the strong and healthy, who have enfeebled their strength and fallen to a premature grave. It is not possessing, but really having, rightly using, diligently cultivating, that ensures success, however great the advantages may have been. And so in the ranks of the ungodly, the real "fools" of the Psalmist, and the company of the lost, are many to be found who started with noblest ad-

vantages and brightest prospects ; but they never were real possessors of the truth within their reach ; they never *had* it, never made it their own, and therefore lost it, and now mourn in darkness the loss that cannot be repaired.

True having is the sure way to getting. In the kingdom of heaven it matters not from what point you start. If you but get firm hold of the truth as it is in Jesus, get true faith in Him, and through that faith true life, whatever you were, He will ever lead you on, and give you more. It is not splendid talents, nor great learning, nor large possessions that of necessity win the race. Whatever their advantages, the contrast is soon lost, and they may be distanced after all. A burning blade of grass may set a forest in a blaze, and the largest fire burn itself out for want of fresh supply. A few seeds well sown are better than a bushel left to dry. It is not what we have, but whether we *really have it*, on which all depends.

In Christian work, great talent is a power for good, and where well used is an enviable power ; but faithful use of even little talent is worth as much in the Saviour's eye, and will sometimes even accomplish more.

In the study of this word, learning and talent are not to be underrated or thrown away ; but the heart of an earnest man with but little lore will often get more quickly to the heart of the Bible than the cold talent of the most lettered scholar, and will get more

riches out of the storehouse, and purer ore out of the mine.

In Christian life, the great advantages of early training, example, and the light of a Christian home tell for much; but a real earnest hold of Christian principle will accomplish more. In the Christian course, the race is not to the swift: and many with all their advantages, because heartless and cold, are outstript by those who, throwing all their heart into the race, do get much nearer to the goal.

"He that hath, to him shall be given." The more we get to the real heart of the matter, not content with an outward possession, but laying firm hold of the Gospel, and making it our own, the more rapidly shall we advance, the more surely shall we grow. Christ will enrich us from His inexhaustible store. The Spirit will lead us into all truth, and "He that *hath*, to him shall be given."

And just as surely will negligent trading lead to loss—perhaps to ruin. Of what advantage is it to any man to have begun with large capital, if, by gambling transactions, reckless speculations, or foolish neglect, he has thrown it all away? They only serve to make his failure more conspicuous, his ruin more disastrous. Of what use to a man the possession of a large estate; if, through idleness or folly, he lets the whole become a wilderness? It only exists to advertise his folly and his sin. Better a desert to start with than a paradise turned into one. Or of what use

talent, education, position, good prospects, to the man who, through vice, licentiousness, or intemperance, has fooled away the whole, and sunk to the level of the lowest of the low? None of these things will keep a man up. They only add to his degradation when he is down. Yes, and he falls the lower, because of the height from which he fell.

So was it then. The crowd round Christ contained some of the proudest of the sons of men; and because they spurned the light, the day arrived when they were found amongst the most corrupt and degraded —a contempt and byword to the heathen themselves.

And of what use to us our Bibles, our Sundays, our Christian name and national repute, our many privileges, our Christian liberty, our Christian truth, if we ourselves make no use of them all? They will not save us. Neglect them now, and you may gradually sink to the level of the most worldly and wicked that you see around you. Neglect them now, and you may find your place with the trifler, the scoffer, the sceptic, the infidel, by-and-by. Neglect them long, and you may be found with those who say in their heart, "There is no God." Neglect them altogether, and you will be found with those who rue in hopeless despair the loss they brought upon themselves, the eternal loss of the light they once possessed and the salvation they might have secured.

III.—In conclusion, let us notice *Some illustrations of this law.*

We see it at once in the history of those who first listened to Christ. In that great crowd there was many a proud, well-educated Jew, who would have looked down with contempt upon the ignorant followers of Christ. But wait a few years, and you find the contrast begin to tell. The unbelieving are descending in the scale. Even before the Sanhedrim the apostles are the nobler of the two. They go lower still; and all that is known is that at length they fell to the lowest depths of vice, till ruin engulphed the guilty city and all within its walls. And for the others, mark their steady progress—the life they led, and the death they died; the work they accomplished, and the books they have left behind. The publican and fisherman have left in their works a glorious witness to the fact that "to him that hath, shall be given;" while the other gives a witness as striking on the other side, that "from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

But the same law has worked perpetually within the Christian Church. There have been times when the light has seemed to shine most brightly. Christian privileges have abounded, the Christian name has stood high, and Christian worship has been universal. But it has been unmeaning, fashionable, heartless, and cold—a mere lifeless form. And because it was nothing more, the light has faded and a dark night

has set in. And there have been other times when the privileges have been far less; but they who were Christians in name were Christians in deed, holding fast and loving dearly what they had, and hence the light had grown till the Church that seemed to have lost its light has gone forth "clear as the sun, fair as the moon, terrible as an army with banners."

And it works still.

Are you blessed with Christian privileges? Take care that you really have them, and you will find that through them you reach a higher standing than earthly possessions alone could bestow. But if your having is but careless and negligent, they will lose their worth, their influence, their power, until it would have been even better not to have had them at all.

Have you a Bible? No doubt you will say you have. But are you sure you have? Do you ever read it? Have you found out its worth? Have you ever got hold of the real truth it contains, found the Saviour it reveals? If not, Christ would tell you that you really *have* no Bible at all. *Having* a book is not merely owning the cover and the leaves, but studying and knowing what it contains. You have the paper or the print; but the Bible itself you have never made your own. And if you do not, the day will come when you will lose what you now have, and find neither Bible nor light with which to read one in the outer darkness to which you are carelessly making your way. But open it; make its contents

your own ; lay hold of the hope set before you ; find your way to faith in Christ, and your little light will grow to the glorious light of an everlasting day.

It is not quantity but reality that is needed ; not much faith, but real faith ; not much love, but true love ; not much knowledge, but an earnest grasp of the truth as it is in Jesus. However much you may possess, if all be superficial, the creek will soon run dry. However little, if real and true, it will be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Strong impressions are of little worth if you always let them go ; the lightest are invaluable if you keep them till they are set so firmly that the world's rough handling cannot rub them off. Deep holes may be dug in sand; but a little wind or one rising tide will fill them up again. Yet even the print of a footstep and the impression of a leaf have been found long ages after both leaf and bird had wasted away. Hold fast what you have—the knowledge, the impression, the conviction, the truth. Let faith really make it your own. Above all, *have* faith in Christ ; and from that little there shall grow eternal blessedness—a fulness of joy. But bury in the earth, or hold with a loose hand, your privileges, your knowledge, the truth, the light, which you seem to have in such abundance now ; and the time will come when, in the loss of all and in outer darkness, you will learn the full meaning of the words, "from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

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